UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PREACHING TO THE CRISES OF VIOLENCE

IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO

THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE

OF

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DAYTON, OHIO

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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FORT WASHINGTON, MARYLAND

NOVEMBER, 1994

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 1989, I graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, and I deeply appreciated the stimulus that the lectures afforded by allowing me to address some deeply held theological issues in the area of religion and violence. My special thanks to Donald Capps, William Harte Felmeth Professor of Pastoral Theology, and Daniel L. Migliore, Arthur M. Adams Professor of Systematic Theology, who helped me to formulate and to refine my thinking about some issues in this project.

I also want to thank the mentors of this program, Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor and Dr. Charles E. Booth for their insight, intellect, and integrity given to me and my colleagues of the Proctor-Booth Fellows. The differences in their teaching and preaching challenged me greatly in sermon preparation. Without their support this project would not have been possible. In addition, appreciation is given to Dr. Howard Synder for his insightful comments and for being the faculty committee reader for this project.

My friend and colleague, the Rev. Congressman Floyd Flake, Pastor of the Allen A.M.E. Church, and U.S. Representative from Jamaica, New York provided the necessary balance that I needed to finish this work while in the

pastorate. I also want to note a special indebtedness to another friend, the Rev. Maurice Wilson, Ph.D., who provided me with the professional dialogue and insight needed when there seemed to be no one available to discuss these important issues.

In a similar way, to close friends and members of Hunter Memorial A.M.E. Church, Lucy Perez, M.D., and Sylvia Quinton, J.D., who work for the Center for Substance and Alcohol Prevention, Rockville, Maryland, placed at my disposal their vast resources and knowledge of substance abuse, violence, and teen suicide. I am deeply indebted to their commitment to see me through this project.

My appreciation also to Bishop John R. Bryant, and his wife, the Rev. Cecelia W. Bryant, for their leadership and initial mentoring of my life. Words can not express the profound impact that these two individuals have had in my religious education and nurturing. Similarly, my thanks to Bishop Frederick C. James, Presiding Prelate of the Second Episcopal District, for allowing me to be absent from important district meetings, conferences, and workshops while research was performed on this project.

A special thanks must be expressed for my colleagues in the Department of History, Politics and International Studies at Bowie State University. Professors Abdul Bangura, Ralph Parris, William Lewis, Sammye Miller, Zak Kondo, and Mario Fenyo, tolerated my absence from class and compensated for my

occasional travel to United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. Also, Mrs. Temperance Ali, the department secretary, provided word processing assistance when it was most desperately needed. Without this cooperative effort it would have been virtually impossible to do this project.

I also want to express a debt of gratitude to the officers and members of Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, Suitland, Maryland, where I have the privilege to pastor. In many ways this project reflects the suffering, pain, sorrow, disappointment, and struggle of all the members who helped me in some way to comprehend the concept of victimization, violence, and suffering. Words can not express my appreciation for the assistance that Stacey Crooks and Rena Griffin provided during this project. Stacey typed while expecting her second child. A special thanks to her husband, Richard Crooks, for allowing her to spend long hours pouring over this document. A special debt of gratitude to Rena Griffin who made her personal computer available when mine was being repaired. Both Rena and Stacey have been called to the ministry at Hunter Memorial A.M.E. Church.

A special thanks to Darryl Giles and Barbara Murdock, who spent hours recording and duplicating the sermons used in this project, and for keeping an accurate tape library. Their endless efforts have made this work much more palatable.

My special thanks to my parents, Phyllis and Henry, who read, edited, and critique this document while providing

spiritual and financial support to complete the program. Their parenting brought me to this point and doubtlessly will carry me to the end of my days. No one has greater parents.

A debt of thanks and gratitude to my cousin Mrs. Norma Brown-Ford, who proofed the final document. No one can measure the invaluable information and support that she provided during this project.

My deepest love and appreciation for my wife, the Rev. Debyii Sababu-Thomas, who provided the love, prayers, support throughout this project while working on her doctorate at Howard University and caring for our four children, Micah, Michael, Mercii, and Melech. I am forever in her debt.

I dedicate this document to the Glory of God, and to all the victims of violence who participated in this project, and especially to Gloria Mooring-Davis who died of cancer before the project was finished. Although she suffered great pain, and lay in the hospital for several days, not once did she complain or become angry with God. Through her genuine love for God I am learning more about those who suffer with incurable diseases. Gloria has demonstrated the power of God's grace in the last hour of need. The dedication of this work to her is a small token of thanks on my own behalf, and on behalf of the many others whom she has touched during her short life.

ABSTRACT

PREACHING TO THE CRISES OF VIOLENCE IN

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY MARYLAND

by

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United Theological Seminary, 1994

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Rev. Maurice Wilson, Ph.D.

This project was designed to implement preaching as a crisis intervention instrument for congregation members. The project sought through preaching to focus on the crisis needs expressed by the victimized, understanding that effective communication and intervention might exist between the preacher and the violated.

The report outlines theological, hermeneutical, and biblical bases for the concept of intervention through preaching. Methodology entailed determination of issues people wanted addressed; preparation of sermons based on those concerns; and summarizing feedback received. The project showed positive results since people found assistance for issues they were confronting.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Goal of the Project

The purpose of this document is not to discuss every aspect of violence, crime, and abuse that exists in America, but this project will focus mainly on the consideration of preaching to the crises of violence that exist in Prince George's County, Maryland. Prince George's County, Maryland is one of the fastest growing counties in the United States. Its proximity to one of the most violent districts in America, namely the District of Columbia, is causing an increase in violence in the Prince George's area. The African American churches are experiencing an increase in growth because of the escalation of violence in the Prince George's community. Crises intervention, funerals, and memorials are becoming more and more common place in the community.

Upon arrival as pastor in 1987 of Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, Prince George's County, Maryland, I was immediately made aware of the rapid increase in violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse, stress, suffering and pain in the community. The high stress of the area produced an increase in my counseling appointments while I commuted

between Prince George's County and Princeton, New Jersey (I was completing a Master of Divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary in Pastoral Theology). I discovered that there was little or no research pertaining to religion and violence in the local parish. I became increasingly concerned about this issue considering the fact that I was so closely involved with the problem.

Given the increase of violence in our families, work place, and neighborhoods within our community (i.e., Prince George's County), what role can the sermon play as an intervention strategy? To be more specific, consideration is given only to sermons preached from the pulpit of Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church in Prince George's County, Maryland. Hunter Memorial is used as an example because (1) it is located demographically in a violent area near the District of Columbia city limits, (2) it is a sample of moderate church growth within the county, and (3) it has members who have been violated by the rapid change in the community. The members of this congregation should present a sample of the pain and suffering that is associated with violence.

To this end, this document will discuss in chapter two the conventional definitions given to violence versus an attempt to redefine the term violence as it relates to the lives of the victims in the community. In addition, there will be a discussion on the spiral of violence in the Prince

George's community as a paradigm to all major metropolitan areas. Also, in chapter two violence will be described as a new form of evil that is paralyzing our community. In chapter three, a view of violence and suffering will be analyzed for possible biblical approaches from the prospective of the prophets and the gospel tradition. This chapter is essential to the preparation and development of sermons. The task of theology and the impact of preaching will be treated in chapter four. The issue of theodicy and liberation theology will be scrutinized from the Latin American perspective in the hope of finding some theological correlations that can be used in sermon development and crises intervention. In addition, this chapter will discuss several aspects of preaching that were developed specifically for this project and now in practice. The conclusion of this chapter contains a section on the ethics of violence and suffering. The contextual analysis of the project is included in chapter five along with a history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church's involvement in the struggle for the liberation of African Americans; a change in the history of Hunter Memorial A.M.E. Church over the last ninety-seven years from a community gathering church to a community activist church. Included in this chapter is a brief spiritual autobiography discussing what I bring to this project that is unique. The replicable model, the results of the model, and the implications of the project are discussed in chapter six. This chapter is a

result of the sermons preached and the data observed and derived found in appendix one and two. Finally, chapter seven contains a summary of the project.

The project is designed to:

(1) assist a pastor working effectively with his/her congregation through a crisis of violence.

(2) enrich understanding and deepen appreciation of the sermon as a tool for intervention.

(3) stimulate pastors and teachers to further creative sermon preparation and lessons.

In summary, the project will proceed based on my understanding of the theological and biblical framework necessary to minister to individuals in crisis. My theology may or may not change and will be noted in the conclusion. Several members of the congregation will be interviewed, questionnaires will be distributed, evaluation of this information will assist in the development and preparation of the sermons, seven sermons will be preached over a seven week period related to the crises that members may be experiencing. All of this information will be documented in this project.

CHAPTER 2

CLARIFYING OUR TERMS

Conventional Definitions of Violence

The conventional definitions of violence immediately impose restraints in the thinking of most individuals. Most would agree that violence implies the overt physical act of destruction by one person or persons. Today, this overt physical act of destruction involves hitting, stabbing, shooting, beating, raping, or in any other way made the object of physical abuse. Conventional understanding of violence is only understood in the sense realm. Violation or abuse is only evidenced through what we can feel or see. According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, violence is the act of force by one person upon another, that is, "exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse."

Robert McAfee Brown informs us in Religion and Violence concerning several conventional definitions of violence: (1)"the Eisenhower Commission...behavior designed to inflict physical injury to people or damage property, (2) George Edwards' book Jesus and the Politics of Violence ... violence is physical force resulting in injury or destruction of property or persons in violation of general moral belief or

civil law, (3) Richard Hofstader, in his introduction to American Violence: A Documentary History, uses the term violence to describe those acts which kill or injure persons or do significant damage to property."[1]

Beyond Conventional Definitions of Violence

The Latin roots from which we get the English word for violence is *volare*, which means "to violate." Essentially what this means is whatever violates another person or imposes upon his/her person or personhood. One cannot deny that this incorporates the conventional definition of violence, that is, the abusing or denouncement or total disregard for another human beings body or property, but it also leaves one to include the violation of personhood as an unconventional definition.

The violation of personhood is important to the thesis of this work, because it is the person who ultimately suffers from any act of violence whether overtly or covertly perpetrated. While it is certain that certain acts of violence can involve physical or potentially threatening situations, we must, however, consider the destruction of

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[1]Conventional views of violence in our society define it as a spasmodic eruption or a psychological impulse. Brown clearly brings forth the hidden aspects of structural violence in our society by describing it as something created, preserved and built into the status quo of our society for the advantage of a small minority. (Cf. Religion and Violence (Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1973), 5-9.)

personhood in ways that are not so obvious at all, except to the victim. This new approach to the nonconventional definition of violence helps us in some way to empathize with the verbal abuse of the battered wife, the patient assisted suicide by a medical doctor, the inadequate health programs for the terminally ill HIV patient, poverty and homelessness, or even the sexual abuse of an individual by a priest or pastor.

The term *"personhood"* is important, because it represents a unique individual, characteristically different in race, color and creed, male or female within our society. Personhood implies the totality of the individual, and not just the mind, body, or soul. One should not and cannot legitimately speak of the value of one person over another, since, from the individual's perspective, his/her worth is beyond measure. In a perverted sense, the violent act throws light on an otherwise forgotten and unidentified person and transforms this person from an remote object to a recognized subject. Until recently, the increased violent conditions in our society have caused some to be immune to the identity of the victims of violence in our society. But, as more and more individuals become victims, the more relevant becomes the concept of personhood.

The Spiral of Violence

The social dimensions of violence in our society is not

a new phenomenon, however, the rate and preeminence it occupies in our lifestyles today is overwhelming. It would appear that violence in our society is spiralling out of control. The more money[2], people and time devoted to the conditions and victims of violence the more it seems to spiral beyond control. This spiral of violence has compelled Bill Clinton, the 42nd President of the United States, to initiate a crime bill with the hope of curtailing the rising crisis of violence in our communities.

President Clinton is not the first President to face a crisis of violence in America. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence had a slightly different approach. This commission associated violence with the term *"injustice,"* and published a report entitled To Establish Justice, To Ensure Domestic Tranquility which clearly indicated that injustice breeds violence.[3]

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[2]Some have estimated that the crime bill will cost the American taxpayer as much as $5 billion dollars a year. The House and Senate reach an agreement that federal money could be used at the expense of other programs. (Cf. "Who Foots the Crime Bill?" The Washington Post, 1 August, 1994, Editorial Section, A20).

[3]"The way in which we can make the greatest progress toward reducing [overt] violence in America is by taking the actions necessary to improve the conditions of family and community life for all who live in our cities, and especially for the poor who are concentrated in the ghetto slums...To make violence unnecessary, our institutions must be capable of providing justice for all who live under them..Violence has usually been the lava flowing from the top of a volcano fed by deeper fires of social dislocation and injustice; it has not been stopped solely by capping the top, but have managed to make the adjustments necessary to cool the fires of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy. (Cf. National Commission

There is a long history that equates injustice as an act of violence. It is embedded in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas in his discussion of human law. In Summa Theologica, St. Thomas Aquinas states that unjust laws are acts of violence rather than laws. If a law is not framed from the natural law of God, then it is a wicked law.[4] Aquinas suggests that laws themselves can violate the personhood of individuals as well as society causing one to go against what they might consider as a personal right. How does one identify or recognize that which is inherently violent to one's person both covertly or overtly? In a fast pace, high technological society on the verge of the 21st century, who determines what is violence? Is it naïve to think that violence can be eradicated from our society? To what extent is violence a form of suffering and evil?

A Form of Evil

The problem of evil has always been a very complex subject in the life of the church and society. Where does evil come from? Who is the progenitor of evil? If God is so powerful and good why do evil and suffering still exist?

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on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. To Establish Justice, To Ensure Domestic Tranquility. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969).

[4]Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, (Ia, IIae, q.96.4).

There are probably as many approaches to these problems as there are theologians to give solutions. There is, however, one statement upon which most theologians will agree, that human beings do suffer and at different levels of intensity.

To be sure, people neither seek to be victims of violence, nor do they seek to suffer in life. Suffering is a resultant of violence that the victim or the victimized[5] experience. Yet, for many, violence and suffering have become a way of life. Why do we have to suffer? Where does suffering originate? It is widely accepted in Christendom that Yahweh is the author and finisher of all life. The question must be raised: If Yahweh is so powerful and good, why does suffering exist? This debate over the providence of a loving God and the suffering of mortal man is endless and becomes the central issue for the theodicy of God. Theodicy refers to the attempt to justify the goodness of God in the face of the manifold evil present in the world. Either God is able to prevent evil and will not, or God is willing to prevent it but cannot. If the former, God is not merciful; if the latter, God is not omnipotent. Or suffering may have a purpose and a function that God does control and affirm. God may permit suffering to achieve a moral and spiritual end.

It is clear that violence is either parallel to evil or modulated by the force of evil. Either way violence is

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[5]Here I choose to use the word *victimized* in a plural sense referring to a group of individuals that have suffered.

associated with evil enough to be designated as a form of evil. Each person who suffers from this form of evil seeks to unravel the mysterious web that results when suffering is entwined with other experiences of life. The classical experiences of violence stand at a great distance from normal violence (i.e., if there is such a thing). For example, the violence portrayed as experienced by Joseph, Moses and Jesus have been portrayed as violence on an epic scale.[6] The commonplace victim of violence encounters suffering and evil while the world carries on its day-to-day activities; young couples seek to buy their first home, business executives transact deals that will affect the stock exchange, mothers give birth to babies, politicians solicit citizens for votes, pausing long enough to do a little more than notice that one or other individual happens to be absent.

To the victim, evil seems to be without cause or meaning adding to the frustration of existence. Victims of suffering and evil often interpret their ordeals to be either random accidents or punishment for some act in life. According to Daniel Liderbach, victims often perceive themselves to be violently pushed aside by the seemingly indifferent swipe of the force of evil.[7] Evil does not allow the victim to gain

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[6]The biblical view of violence and suffering will be treated in more detail in Chapter 3.

[7]Cf. Daniel Liderback, Why Do We Suffer (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), Chapter 5.

access to some meaning in the critical moments of their suffering.

Evil is formed by the corruption of the 'good' that is created by God. Evil is a defect, a deficiency, a privation of the 'good' in creation. The final outcome of evil is sin. Sin is a loss of integrity with God, a separation from the presence of God, of immortality, of knowledge, and of posterity. All of this was lost by the first parents of humanity, Adam and Eve, when they were banished from the presence of God. This is but one possible solution to the question of evil that is raised by some: How can the 'good' that is created by God cause evil?

Humankind's response to this loss of integrity and alienation is violence. The human being is involved sin, evil and violence by self-centeredness, by becoming other than concerned for community. To become self-centered and retreat constantly into self is evil, because it is remote from the Spirit of God. Self-centeredness is evil and the product is territorial violence. Territorial violence forces the self-centered person to lay claim to property, material things and money. Evil can connote an act of one's volition. While suffering can come from natural causes that are nature's necessities and processes. What then is the proscription for this form of evil?

CHAPTER 3

THE SCRIPTURES, VIOLENCE, AND SUFFERING

A Biblical View Of Violence and Suffering

It is important for the religious literature to give meaning, comfort, moral guidance and hope to a people who have become victimized by violence and suffering. In some cases, the one source of sanity that keeps a person from losing all contact with reality is the religious literature in which he or she believes.

The average person has little or no knowledge of historical criticism, literacy criticism, biblical languages, biblical exegesis, or Scripture common theology and liberation theology.[8] Yet, many victims of violence rely upon these methods as interpreted by others on their behalf.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the religious text of the community reveals God's plan of moral guidance, comfort, and hope through sociological and literary analysis of the community. Once the community interprets what is thought to

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[8]Cf. Lucien Richard, O.M.I. "A Biblical View of Suffering", What are They Saying About The Theology of Suffering (New York: Panelist Press, 1992), Chapter 1. Richard and Brueggemann discuss these techniques of biblical analysis used by theologians and scholars.

be the revealed textual message, it becomes incorporated into the faith and hope of community lifestyle. Over time, biblical interpretation by communities becomes the driving force in overcoming the pain of suffering. Lucien Richard describes the process in this way:

> This concept of revelation as interpretation is related to the emergence of two methods of scriptural exegesis - the sociological analysis and the literary analysis. The sociological approach forces us "to ask about the social intention and social function of a text in relation to the community and situation upon which the text infringes." Texts both in their inception and in their reception cannot be disconnected from the social processes that mark the community that generates or interprets them.[9]

The process of revelation as interpretation is an important aspect of biblical interpretation and is essential to the victory of violence. As stated before, the victimized have a need to relate intensely to the religious text of the community. A need to find solace and meaning for their plight. However, some interpretations only further the anguish and the pain.

The Scriptures of the Judeo-Christian Community are replete with stories of suffering, faith and hope. The victimized identify with the characteristics of the Scriptures in an effort to gain meaning in their own personal crisis. The central point, however, is that with few exceptions the

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[9]Cf. The inner quote is taken from Walter Brueggeman's Revelation and Violence: A study in Contextualization (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1986), p.4. Richard and Brueggeman collaborate to imply and emphasize the imaginative construing of a world or community by the text.

characters victimized in the Scriptures never remain that way. Their pain, hurt, destruction, captivity or potential threat have been removed, curtailed, eliminated, or arrested by the conclusion of the story. Dr. Clarice Martin says, "...these characters are uniquely qualified for their particular situation...."[10] Does this biblical view of violence and deliverance demythologize the epic characters like Joseph, Moses and David? Does this biblical view demythologize the God who promises to hear our cry, soothe our hurt, and punish our oppressors? In what ways, if any, does this biblical view assist in strengthening a community's faith in the God of the Scriptures? An attempt will be made to address these issues in Chapters 5 and 6.

Violence and the Prophets

The prophets were compassionate people who had a deep concern for the suffering of Yahweh's people. Lucien Richard writes "Not only did they know God and see reality as God sees it, but they also felt as God felt; they experienced God's grief over the suffering of the people."[11]

In the writings of the prophets, the terms gazal, ratsats, megas, 'anah, and 'ashaq, represent the most extreme forms of violence. It is interesting to note that this kind

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[10]Dr. Clarice Martin made this statement during one of her New Testament lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary 1988 while I was a seminarian there.

[11]Lucien Richard, Theology of Suffering, 20.

of violence was perpetrated by the few powerful, rich, dominant members of the society against the many weak, poor dispossessed members of the same society.[12]

R.B. Coote has written a study on the Book of Amos. Coote's study contends that there exists at least a three-stage process of violence addressed by the prophet in the eighth century. The context described is not that different from the twentieth century and probably the twenty-first century. It was one of a social class, gender, and cultural violence against the weaker members of the ancient Israelite society. The first is called the A-stage prophetic descriptions. The second is called the B-stage prophetic texts. The third and final is called the C-stage reversal texts.

The A-stage prophetic descriptions are steeped in eighth-century social classicism, genderfication, and cultural violation of weaker members of the Israelite community. The A-stage violence is often poignant, venomous and direct as in Jeremiah 22:17 "But you can only see your selfish interests; you kill the innocent and violently oppress your people."

The B-stage prophetic text is just as graphic as its A-stage counterpart. For instance, Micah 3:2 'You skin my

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[12]Cf. The political violence described in Micah 2:2. In Malachi 1:13, the power steal legalized theft; Isaiah 10:2 this violence is interpreted as violence committed without a conscience; Ezekiel 22:1-31 it is a merciless plunder against the weak; Jeremiah calls this violence murder; Hosea says it is murderous oppression Hosea 5:11.

people alive and tear the flesh off their bones.' However, in Isaiah 58:3 this type of violence is referred to as hypocritical. "The truth is that at the same time you fast , you pursue your interests and oppress your workers."

The C-stage reversal texts uses the terms 'atsab, ra'shah, and parats. The violence described by the term 'atsab is defined as sadness, grief, miserable fate; while ra'shah denotes violence by military force or destruction between nations or whole groups of people.[13] The term parats denotes wanton violence.[14] This type of violence, as described by R. B. Coote, comes from neither powerful groups nor from Yahweh. It is interesting to note that this type of violence is never associated with the oppressed as the instigators.

As one can plainly see, the three stages of violence observed by R.B. Coote could very easily be applied to violent crises in today's communities across America.

Violence in the Gospel Tradition

Ephraim K. Mosothoane's essay "Violence in the Gospel Tradition" in Theology and Violence: The South African Debate is basically a linguistic analysis and hermeneutic aimed at interpreting the violent language used in the New Testament.

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[13]Cf. Jeremiah 8:16; 49:21

[14]Cf. Nehemiah 3:35; 4:11; Isaiah 30:13; 54:13; Hosea 4:10.

This is a fairly good essay to relate the violent words of the first century with the violent words of the twentieth century, Mosothoane states,

> The administration of Pontius Pilate was, according to Philo of Alexandria, characterized by corruption, violence, robbery, brutality, extortion, and execution without trial...the early Christian movement lived in a world of religio-political unrest, violent rebellion, and it's even more violent repression. Innumerable human lives were similarly and brutally brought to a premature end by sword, stoning or crucifixion. The New Testament shows us Christians suffering at the hands of mobs (Jewish and Gentiles alike) as well as state and religious authorities (again both Jewish and Roman).[15]

This author agrees with Mosothoane that today the Christian debate is with the appropriate response to the violence we face in our own society.

Unlike the Old Testament prophetic tradition, there seems to be no clear single pattern of consistent attitude and response to violence. One would agree, however, that the most violent section of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. In this book, the imagery is one of a God of wrath, locusts, scorpions, and winged creatures that torture human beings who long to die.

The most obvious violent picture in the Gospels is the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Even though Jesus preached and taught peace to his disciples, when it came time for his

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[15]Cf. Ephraim K. Mosothoane, "Violence in the Gospel Tradition," ed. Charles Villa-Vincio, Theology and Violence: The South African Debate (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 111-132.

arrest, the Roman soldiers came fully armed anticipating a confrontation with the disciples of Jesus. In terms of violent language in the New Testament, the Gospel of Mark has the harshest language followed by the Gospel of Matthew which has more violent language than Luke. Luke is the most refined when it comes to violent language. This variation is due to the historical context of each community wherein the texts were written, the level of conflict and persecution that the community was subjected, the commitment of the faith community receiving the message, and whether the faith community was all Jewish, all Gentiles or a combination of Jews and Gentiles. According to Mosothoane, there is a theme of violence in each of the gospels. In Mark, the theme appears to be exhortation for a suffering Christian community; Matthew sought to equip this Jewish-Christian community to define and defend itself against orthodox Judaism; Luke's gospel did not emerge out of conditions of persecution and violence, but in an effort by the evangelist to stress the university of the gospel. Luke, however, stresses the importance of marginal people being blessed by the ministry of Jesus.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY, VIOLENCE, AND PREACHING: DEVELOPMENT OF A THEOLOGY OF PREACHING FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The Problem of Theology and the Task of Ministry

"Theology without proclamation is empty, proclamation without a theology is blind."[16] Gerhard Ebeling's statement began a transformation in my early theological understanding of the nature and purpose of biblical preaching in the local church context. It was during this period that this author could see, more than ever, that there was a special relation between theology and preaching. This special relation continued to interact, develop, and inform my theology, and my preaching. It continued to exist in such a way that my theology matured spiritually while deepening in content and gaining in substance relevant to the context of the local church. Consequently, my proclamation began to minister to a wider audience. Ebeling's statement gave me a basis for developing my fundamental ideas concerning theology and proclamation as they related to my own personality in the local church.

If theology is empty without the proclamation of the

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[16]Gerhard Ebeling, Theology and Proclamation (London: William Collins, Sons and Co., 1966), 20.

Gospel message, then preaching must constantly keep in tension a theology that is both biblically and Christocentrically based. Ebeling's statement caused me to reflect theologically on my purpose as a minister and to avoid the temptation in my preaching ministry and theological development from being too esoteric and theoretical. The beauty of this tension is that it helped me to maintain a certain level of relevancy in my early ministry similar to a cross-check and counter-balance of my proclamation.

An early question that I raised was which is more important, theology or preaching? If theology, then why are so many sermons void of theological depth? If preaching is more important, then what is its raison d'etre? Ian Pitt-Watson helped me to answer this question to some degree by stating that, "A theology which is not seen in some sense to be relevant to preaching is an inadequate theology."[17] For me this seemed to be a corollary to Ebeling's statement addressed earlier in this essay. It also says that preaching and theology are equally important in ministry. Pitt-Watson's statement, however, forced my theological understanding of the nature and purpose of biblical preaching to strive constantly to be relevant to the needs of the congregation and community. I thought that this could be accomplished by hopefully understanding that the very essence of theology was preaching

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[17]Ian Pitt-Watson, Preaching: A Kind of Folly (Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1976), 33.

the Gospel message of Jesus Christ with a prophetic understanding of the social context that engages the people in their day-to-day existence. Stated another way by Pitt-Watson, "Preaching is the heart and soul of theology, and theology is the conscience of preaching."[18] Pitt-Watson helped me to understand that my preaching must be informed by theology, and conversely my theology must have the ability to be preached, if it is to be relevant.

As a pastor and former assistant pastor, serving my third congregation over the last fifteen years, I realize that I bring to this essay certain experiences that have helped, as well as hindered my theological and methodological thought in the area of theodicy. Over the last fifteen years, I have had to face racism, plus political, social, and economical injustices. These injustices were personal, as well as in support of the members of my respective congregations. By far, the most difficult problems and decisions as a pastor were related to the question of theodicy. On more than one occasion, it has been my unpleasant duty to try to comfort a family who has lost their home because of some regulation designed to reclaim low-income housing from the poor; to give counsel to someone who has suffered racial discrimination; or to comfort a family whose twenty-five year old son has been paralyzed by a car accident and is slowly dying in intensive care; or to discuss racial hatred with a pastor who found a

[18]Watson, 35.

cross burning on the lawn of his church, or try to explain to a congregation why this country would bomb Grenada, Libya, and Iraq for terrorist acts and not confront the apartheid in South Africa face-to-face? The list of questions goes on.

No matter what the starting point, the standard questions concerning theodicy were always the same: If God is good and all powerful, then why is there so much evil in the world? Why does God allow the wicked to prosper? I use to try and answer these questions theologically using Ebeling's methodology of relevant theology and preaching, hoping to help their struggle and frustration with what they could perceive as an injustice. I soon discovered several things. First, theodicy is a complex issue that is basically theological, but also embraces other social sciences. Second, if one question were asked by a victim of violence it would lead to another question and then another, and so on. There seemed to be no end to the questions. Answers did not appear to be the solution to their frustration. This often implied that this individual was in crisis and more interested in results than answers. Third, there was always the individual who raised a question on the problem of theodicy only to start an argument about God. Fourth, there was always one who after telling his/her story of suffering and pain would follow by asking the question, "why me?" I found out that knowing the reasons for suffering in the community of faith did not always provide a state of comfort for the victims, and it often led to further

grief.

Some of the members of my congregation often associated prolonged and unusual suffering with God's judgement for sins committed (knowingly or unknowingly). Those who believed this would confess sins that they had committed earlier in their lives that were often irrelevant to events of suffering and evil that they were going through. The theme of suffering for causes unknown is an ancient one dealt with in the *Book of Job*.

It became clear to me that my greatest challenge was developing and implementing a theology of preaching applicable to my congregations needs. The works of Cone, Gutierrez, and Segundo have been very helpful in this development (see "Theology, Preaching, and the Problem of Theodicy"). By using their methodologies, I have been able to wrestle with the very difficult areas in my theological development. The hermeneutical circle of Segundo, which will be discussed in the section titled "Theology, Preaching, and the problem of Theodicy," helped me to discover a new way of doing theology from the vantage point of the victim. I began to ask myself: If I could place myself in the victims situation, what would God say in terms of my crises? What would I be feeling? What would I need to survive? Is this God's will for my life? If all this is my fate, where is the hope for tomorrow? These are just a few of the questions that have helped me to reflect on a theology for preaching from the victims point of view.

Regardless of what I felt or liked concerning the state of things, I had to come to the realization that suffering is a necessary process on the road to wholeness. Leonardo Boff calls this worthy suffering, a theme that I will discuss later. The bottom line is that suffering for the sake of Christ is a part of God's mystery (i.e., mysterium Christos). I concluded that we may never fully know or understand, why we suffer, as Job never fully comprehended the reason for his afflictions. If, however, we believe that God's will for us will be done on earth as it is in the reign of God, and if we believe that God leads us through the valleys with death looming over us, then the final outcome will be victorious through Jesus Christ as our Liberator.

Influences That Impact My Theology and Preaching

After serving as an assistant minister for four years at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Baltimore, MD, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. John R. Bryant, I left to attend Boston University School of Theology in Boston, MA. It was at Boston University School of Theology that I was introduced to and studied the works of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Rudolph Bultmann, John Macquarrie, C. Eric Lincoln, Jurgen Moltmann, J. DeOtis Roberts and James Cone just to name a few. During this period my theology, as well as my faith, was stretched to its limits. On the one hand, some of the readings in theology were not useful, because they failed to

relate to the context of the local church. While on the other hand, some of the readings gave me astute insight towards my theological development, particularly the liberation theology writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and James Cone, and the systematic theology writings of John MacQuarrie, Paul Tillich and Jurgen Moltmann.[19] I realized that I needed to be skillful in the manner in which I articulated and represented my own understanding of preaching in the theological context of the people that I served. I felt that then, and I do know that skillful communication is essential to preaching and pastoral ministry. The congregation can receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit not according to Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and James Cone, but through my theological development. "Theology must keep a close watch upon the history of salvation, how God continues to act in history, and not confine itself in any systematic knowledge of revealed truth."[20] Even at this point, I believe that my theology as well as my preaching was still evolving as my Sitz im Liben changed, keeping in mind the continued presence of Yahweh in the lives of the people.

During the early evolution of my ministry, my preaching,

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[19]The scope of this essay would not allow me to discuss the significance that the impact of the works of Macquarrie, Tillich, and Moltmann had on my early development of theology and preaching in the context of local church.

[20]Joseph Fichtner, O.S.C., To Stand and Speak for Christ, "Kerygmatic Theology," ch.5 (New York: Alba House, 1981), 83.

and theology attempted to be communicative, creative, and charismatic remaining relevant in the local context. I found communication skills and the use of language central to the understanding of preaching in its theological context. The proper use of words can make the difference between chaos and confusion in the sermon delivery and the interpretation by the listener can make the difference in the prosperity of the local context. Samuel T. Logan, Jr., Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, agrees and states that "...choosing the right words is the preacher's primary tool."[21] In addition to communicative techniques preaching in the theological context must continually be creative, to the point of "creating an alteration of the life of the hearer according to the Gospel message."[22] Creating an alternative or alteration in the life of the hearer is another central focus for preaching the Gospel message. This creative alteration, whether voluntary or involuntarily motivated by outside influences is an integration or weaving of theology, preaching and pastoral care. Furthermore, for me preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its theological context must be charismatic. By charismatic, I do not simply mean full of divine authority,

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[21]Samuel T. Logan, Jr. (Ed.) "The Phenomenology of Preaching," The Preacher and Preaching (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Published Company, 1986), 160.

[22]Logan, 160.

power and grace, but a sacrament which by its very nature draws attention to itself. My understanding of the charismatic proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus in a theological frame of reference is that theological-preaching becomes the presence of Christ. Charismatic proclamation displays the tension between theology and preaching and makes the Word preached liturgically sacramental. Liturgically sacramental is the active encounter of the preacher and the hearer in the presence of the Lord, the Word read, the Word preached and the Word sacramentally enacted. Subsequently, the community is healed, sustained and transformed. George Scott states that "a soundly and theologically based liturgical pattern is a movement through the Word read, preached and sacramentally enacted to the contrite confession, thanksgiving and praise of the assembled congregation."[23] The sacrament enacted simply means to me that the person leads the rite through his/her own personality and understanding on the Word enacted. In many instances, the preaching moment is sacrament if that moment is considered as the presence of Christ. Moreover, if the hearer reacts to the Gospel message by accepting its truths, then a measure of change has taken place.

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[23]Gideon George Scott, The Kerygmatic and Sacramental Word, 16-45.

African-American Preaching for the Twenty-first Century, and Violence

The purpose of this section is to describe in more detail my theology of preaching as objectively as possible. This section will cover seventeen years as a preacher/pastor and how several influences by key individuals and theological institutions changed my approach to preaching. First, I will describe the impact that my mentor, the Reverend Doctor John Richard Bryant, had on the foundational phase of my preaching. Bishop John R. Bryant introduced me to the art of preaching and essentially formulated my earliest definition. It is here that I raised the question: What is preaching? Second, I will briefly discuss my ideas of the preacher. The greatest demonstration of a theology of preaching is the life that the preacher lives. Who is this person that preaches weekly? Does s/he initiate any act of professionalism that differentiates his daily activity? Third, the preaching moment is central in the African-American tradition of worship and treated with great care in this section. Fourth, some attention will be given to the Africentric biblical interpretation of the Scriptures. This section is most important to describe the violent society in which African-Americans find themselves. This new hermeneutic enables oppressed people to find hope in the midst of violence and despair. Fifth, this section will be devoted to the role of imagination and creativity of a theology of preaching. The question will be raised: How important is the metaphor in

liberation preaching? Does the victim of violence receive healing through metaphorical references? Sixth, what role does the congregation play in the preaching experience? Should the role be passive or active? I suggest in this section that the role of the congregation be as co-preacher, and therefore it must be active. Finally, I will introduce the Holy Spirit as enabler and center in the development of a relationship between preacher and congregation.

What Is Preaching?

The charismatic preaching of Bishop John R. Bryant permeates my spirit and personality extensively. It is sometimes difficult unraveling the tapestry that he skillfully wove into the fabric of my preaching and delivery. He would often paraphrase Phillips Brooks and say to me preaching is truth through personality from a person-to-persons. This statement represented my first contact with a formal definition of preaching. I began to sense that most of what preaching is originates within the heart and soul of the person preaching. According to Dr. Bryant's re-statement of Phillips Brooks, clearly my personality (i.e., what I represent in public and private) wove its way into the fabric that I preached. This was the method that Jesus employed to spread the Gospel message when he said, "I am the truth." Christ not only spoke the truth but he demonstrated the truth of the Gospel message. Dr. Bryant demonstrated this truth in

his life and expected his ministerial staff to do likewise. Demonstrated truth in the preacher's life determines the integrity of the message. Hence, the integrity of the message weighs heavily upon the integrity of the messenger.

Communicating the truth in any other way than through the personality is not preached truth.[24] Communicating in this way makes truth preeminently personal. I later discovered that this statement was not an original statement by Phillips Brooks. It was quoted often by Rev. John Bryant, but is in actuality a restating of an Old Testament Proverb 16.23; 27.19.

In addition to communicated truth through personality, I was taught that preaching had its origins in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This truth did not originate from a perceived knowledge nor from some logical axiom, but is the Incarnate Christ resonating in the called preacher. The Incarnation of the Word must become flesh.

THE PREACHER

Foremost in my development, I learned that the preacher is a Christian first and a preacher second. I was taught and

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[24]Cf. In chapter 5, Donald Capps, "The Relationship of Preaching and Counseling," in Pastoral Counseling and Preaching describes not only the three ways preaching and pastoral counseling are related and the seven characteristics of the counseling sermon, but Capps also depicts what he calls 'perceptual restructuring' as a personality trait of the preacher's exegesis and delivery.

soon discovered personally that the church had too many unregenerate, uneducated preachers and pastors. If I were going to be a preacher, I needed to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I could not preach sanctification, justification, regeneration or even liberation without having first hand experience of these gifts and graces in my life.

Prayer and fasting became an integral part of my life to enhance the gifts and graces I felt God had given me. I formed a small prayer group that would meet every Saturday at noon. We became known as the Upper Room Group because the prayer room was above the outreach center facing Bethel church. The number in attendance would vary according to the weather and the personal schedules involved.

During my encounters with this prayer group, I experienced a deepening of my relationship with the Lord. Some will say that theology is the ground from which the preacher springs. Still others will say that seminary training is the ground from which the life of the preacher springs, but it was clear to me that the private life of the preacher without prayer was soon doomed to failure. I watched Rev. Bryant lead the Friday night prayer meetings without becoming discouraged by the size of the crowd. To this day he has a reputation as a "praying bishop" or the "holy bishop."

The Preaching Moment

There are two essential issues relevant to the preaching moment that I gleaned from Rev. Dr. John R. Bryant. First, there is the preaching moment for conversion. Second, there is the preaching moment as celebration.

The conversion preaching moment is chiefly responsible for kerygma that is evangelical, regenerative, and life changing. Everything the preacher does and says points toward the hearer making a personal decision to accept Christ as his/her personal redeemer. Thus, one can also say the conversion preaching moment is indeed redemptive. I learned that the minister should preach with power expecting someone to respond. The celebration in Black Preaching, as explained by Dr. Bryant, is something that most African Americans come to expect during the worship service. The Call to Worship, the Pastoral Prayer, and the Decalogue are just a few of the items in the order of worship that contribute to setting the mood of worship before the Word is proclaimed.

Although I might read and study Barth, Tillich, Bultmann and Cone for insight toward my theological development, I must be carefully articulate and represent my own understanding of preaching in the theological context of the people. I feel that this is essential to my preaching and pastoral ministry, that is, the congregation can hear the Gospel message through my personal theological development in the power of the Holy Spirit not according to Barth, Tillich, Bultmann or Cone.

I have learned that my theology must keep a close watch upon the history of salvation, how God continues to act in history, and not confine self in any systematic knowledge of revealed truth. My preaching, theology and personality in their development of my ministry must be communicative, creative, and charismatic as they remain relevant in the local context. Communicative skills and the use of language are central for me to understand preaching in theological context, because the proper employ of words can make the difference between chaos and confusion in the sermon delivery and the interpretation by the listener. Samuel T. Logan, Jr., Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, agrees and considers "choosing the right words as the preacher's primary tool."[25] In addition to communicative techniques, my preaching must continually be creative, to the point of creating an alteration of the life of the hearer according to the Gospel message. Finally, for me preaching the Gospel message in its theological context must be charismatic. By charismatic, I do not simply mean full of divine authority, power and grace, but also sacrament. My self-understanding of the proclamation of the Gospel message in a theological frame of reference is that it (theological-preaching) becomes the presence of Christ. It displays the tension between theology and preaching and makes the Word preached liturgical, and sacramental. By sacramental

[25]Logan, 160.

I mean an active encounter of the preacher and the hearer in the presence of the Lord. The Word read, the Word preached and the Word sacramentally enacted comes through the personality and theology of the preacher and subsequently the community is healed, sustained and transformed. A soundly and theologically based liturgical pattern is a movement through the Word read, preached and sacramentally enacted to the contrite confession, thanksgiving and praise of the assembled congregation. The sacrament enacted simply means to me that the person leads the rite through his/her own personality and understanding on the Word enacted through the presence of the Lord.

As a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I must continue to develop a theology that is reflective of my thoughts and spiritual growth in light of the scriptures and be relevant to the needs of my local setting. This theology must not only be substantive, but it is compelled to be full of hope and healing for the hearers of God's word. Theology must proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and foster a vision in the minds of the hearers that they might not perish.

Africentric Biblical Hermeneutic

Twenty-first century Black preaching is anemic without some reference to an Africentric biblical hermeneutic. Dr. Cain Hope Felder has lectured and written extensively on this

subject.[26] It is clear to me that after reading Felder's books that the early training I received at Bethel was Africentric without the label it has today. Many of the sermons I heard Dr. Bryant preach were life altering, empowering, and esteem building messages.

I began to listen to other preachers, such as Walter Thomas, Alfred Vaughn, and Harold Carter, to name a few, who occasionally preached messages that not only were esteem building but raised my level of hope. I believed that this type of preaching affected many lives to make decisions for Christ. I watched as the church grew under the dynamic preaching of these men, and I began to raise questions as to the validity of what they were doing. I kept coming back to the same conclusion that God must be modernizing his message.

Africentric biblical hermeneutic provides a new approach to the literal and figurative debate of ethnic inclusiveness. First, it has very little to do with either, but according to Felder Africentric biblical hermeneutic provides plausible explanations for obvious inaccuracies presented in our communities in the past. Second, Africentric biblical hermeneutic is not simply a replacement of Eurocentric biblical interpretation, rather it is an assertion of a people

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[26]Cf. Cain Hope Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, Family. and his Stony The Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, 1991). These two works of Felder's are invaluable contributions to the life and struggle of African American people and their understanding of pain, suffering and violence.

who have historically been denied their biblical heritage. Therefore, Africentric biblical hermeneutic is a correction of a historical injustice.

The twenty-first century African-American (i.e., the generations of the 70s, 80s, and 90s) is yearning for identity and leadership more than ever. The works of Felder, Cone and other avant-garde African-American theologians must continue to challenge our traditional way of perceiving our identity in a pluralistic society. Modernity demands that we assert ourselves as a people or be lost in the evolution of society. This makes it essential that I communicate a message that will help usher my people into the twenty-first century.

The Role of Imagination

An essential condition for the twenty-first-century African-American preacher is an active imagination. The role of imagination for the African-American preacher always included a vivid imagination that seized the moment and helped the slave listener remember the message with clarity.[27] Today, in many of our Black churches the preacher's imagination is a major source of hope, healing, empowerment, and joy.

Enough can never be said concerning the use of the

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[27]Richard Lischer, A Theology of Preaching. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), this work provided the outline and basic construction for my theology of preaching.

metaphor and other literary techniques by the preacher. I discovered early the importance role of imagination plays in the local church. I witnessed the transformation of an inactive 500 member congregation go from "quiet unconcerned mentality" to a "lively we can do it mentality." All of this was accomplished through one preacher who weaved his imagination and the kerygma to perfection. The kerygma is not first of all an interpretation of a text; it is an announcement of a person.[28] Thus, the task and role of imagination is to broaden the comprehension of a text, enhance its mysteries and make a personal announcement of the message. I am still acquiring knowledge about this process each time I am privileged to preach the Gospel, but I am constantly amazed at the ease at which the Rev. Walter S. Thomas, New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore; the Rev. Charles Adams, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit; the Rev. Charles Booth, Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in Columbus; and Dr. Samuel Proctor, United Theological Seminary, use imagery, allusions, metaphor and similes in the delivery of the Gospel. Even more impressive is the power of these images to convey the message to the hearer and cause them to make some gesture of acknowledgment.

Preaching As Personal Counseling

At Princeton I studied pastoral theology under Dr. Donald

[28]Lischer, 14-22.

Capps, who introduced me to his book Preaching and Pastoral Counseling. This was a new area which cause me to wrestle with messages that effect the lives of people. I knew that I had to find the right elements for preaching in order that I remained relevant and conscious to the needs of the people. Dr. Capps directed me to some of the writings on the preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick and I decided to read Fosdick's The Art of Preaching. I found both of the texts, Fosdick and Capps, very informative.

Harry Emerson Fosdick states, "The right kind of preacher is coerced to become a personal counselor, and the right kind of personal counselor gains some of the most necessary ingredients of preaching."[29] Pastoral counseling is central to the construction of the sermon by speaking to the conditions of the people. This indicates that the preacher is aware of the questions that the people are asking each other. This methodology was also employed by Phillips Brooks who believed that each individual presented his trials as the focus of the message.

Fosdick resisted, to some extent, both expository preaching and topical preaching. The former is relegated to biblical antiquarianism, and the latter toward subjectivism.[30] Fosdick like Dr. Capps suggested that the

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[29]Lischer, 41-92.

[30]Lischer, 135-206.

Aristotelian method (i.e., the speaker, the message, the audience) of sermon construction and delivery be employed. Both suggest that the message start with some experience and situation of the audience (i.e., the "presenting problem" of each sermon). I later discovered that this is essentially the method utilized by Dr. Samuel D. Proctor (i.e., problem-thesis, solution-antithesis, conclusion) in the Doctor of Ministry Program at United Theological Seminary and knew that instantly I needed to be enrolled. Similarly, Dr. Donald Capps suggests that there are four elements in the pastoral counseling session that relate to pastoral counseling in preaching. The four elements: (1) identification of the problem; (2) reconstruction of the problem; (3) diagnostic interpretation; (4) pastoral intervention.[31] The first stage of the counseling session involves identifying the problem of the counselee. Fosdick and Proctor would agree with this first stage because the sermon would be relevant to specific problems asked by the congregation. The second stage contains various facets of the problem. What are the causes of the problem? How did the counselee handle the problem up to this point? Are there others involved? Has the counselee suffered much? These questions are but a few that emerge from the reconstruction of the problem. Once the counselee's problem has been reconstructed, the session proceeds to the diagnostic interpretation which is the third stage. The counselee may

[31]Donald Capps, 120-141.

agree or disagree with the interpretation made by the counselor. Sometimes new insights are suggested for confirmation, clarity, or refutation. When both counselor and counselee agree that the situation has been assessed correctly they then may proceed to the fourth stage, pastoral intervention. The last two stage are quite similar to the relevant question/synthesis of the Proctor method. This may simply involve another session, exploring external resources for coping with the problem, spiritual resources, the church or the community.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit and Preaching

The Rev. John R. Bryant often stated that one should prepare a sermon as if there were no Holy Spirit, then preach the sermon as if there were nothing else but the Holy Spirit. This assertion by Rev. Bryant often perplexed my theological approach to sermon preparation which would allow me to accept this limited employment of the Holy Spirit. Later I determined that he was not eliminating the power or guidance of the Holy Spirit, but would want his preachers to spend quality time researching the Scriptures for that salient point that would be relevant to the lives of the people. Knowing that Rev. Bryant was an ardent, praying pastor, I concluded that he was not asking me to omit the Holy Spirit in my life. He was simply suggesting that the Holy Spirit would act as a silent partner in the actual sermon preparation. The Holy

Spirit and Preaching by Dr. James Forbes, widely hailed as one of the nation's foremost preachers, is a collection of four Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale University. In each of the lectures, Forbes centers on the Holy Spirit as it relates to anointed preaching. Forbes suggests that the presence of the Holy Spirit makes the difference between our failure and our fulfillment of the preached word.[32] This presence is what I believe Dr. Bryant was trying to relate to teach.

The Holy Spirit is also a necessary ingredient in the formation of the preacher. The anointed preacher is open to the will of God and will preach messages that are according to a divine plan to meet the needs of the people. This partnership of the preacher and the anointing of the Holy Spirit matures until there is a oneness of purpose in sermon delivery. What is this anointing? I agree with Forbes who says:

> The anointing is that dimension which continuously provides the oxygen by which all the works of the Spirit are ignited-set on fire to provide energy for activity. So, breathing begins and there's a little flame in the heart. The Spirit fans it, not much, but some. So a little flame begins through the breathing of the Spirit where perhaps too vigorous a visitation could cause it to be extinguished. We preach, lecture, and trust that the word of God will fan the flame.[33]

The anointing of the Holy Spirit in preaching is not exclusive

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[32]Cf. James Forbes, The Holy Spirit and Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 19-40.

[33]Forbes, 19-40.

to denomination, ecclesiastical position, and worship formation. But, the presence of the Spirit in the life of the preacher is a result of an earnest desire to do the will of God.

Theology, Preaching, and the Problem of Theodicy

Important to the theological framework of this essay is the problem of suffering and evil as it appears in the work of the Black Liberation theologian James Cone and the Latin American Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez. The writings of these authors greatly affected my thinking in terms of the politics of evil in our cities. Their writings are important to my theological development because between Boston University School of Theology and Princeton Theological Seminary I adopted their radical departure from Western theology. Although Cone and Gutierrez were both trained in Western theological thought, their interpretation of the task of theology changed or reframed the minds of pastors, preachers, theologians, and the oppressed forever. Even the name liberation theology describes its purpose, that is, to liberate the oppressed from the onslaught of evil and suffering of the oppressor. From these authors, I discovered the broad use of the term theodicy.

First, I discovered that the term theodicy had a much broader meaning than I previously learned from other

theologians. For Cone and Gutierrez theodicy is the specific attempt to justify the goodness of God in the arena of the various aspects of evil present in the world. Hence, the traditional question: What are we to think of the fact that evil exists in the world governed by an omnipotent and good God? If God is so powerful, why does God allow young men and women to be lured into drugs and shot down in the streets? Either God is able to prevent evil and will not, or God is willing to prevent evil and suffering and cannot.[34] A careful examination of the aforementioned questions clearly shows that a dilemma exists when one accepts for the Christian faith the goodness of God in the face of evil. Acceptance of God's unwillingness to act makes God unmerciful. While acceptance of God's inability to control or contain evil, on the one hand, gives rise to the problems with God's omnipotence on the other hand. The major problem for theodicy in Latin American and Black Liberation Theology is the difficulties one encounters speaking about God's action in the world.[35] How can the problems of suffering and evil be changed or reframed to produce a healthy environment as we approach the 21st century?

Second, the use of suffering and evil by Cone and Gutierrez (and most liberation theologians) tends to focus

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[34]Gustavo Gutierrez, On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), xi, xii.

[35]Gutierrez, On Job, xiii.

primarily on the unjust involvement of one group of people over another for social, political, economical, and ethical gains. The results of this suffering and evil (i.e., oppression of marginal people world-wide) are the cause of many dysfunctions in the human and social development of minorities and the marginal people of the socially, politically, and economically deprived world. The question must be asked: why is it that certain ethnic groups are consistently singled out or made to suffer oppression on multiple levels of human involvement? In response to this frustrating aspect of life, William Jones raises the question concerning the ethics and morality of God: Is God a white racist?[36] At first glance, this accusation may seem blasphemous to some, however, the question remains as a challenge to contemporary European dominate thought in theology. What Jones and others are expressing is a genuine desire to know and to speak about God in a racist society that proclaims to be Christian.

Gustavo Gutierrez's approach to theodicy has been helpful for raising my consciousness because now with the addition of Hispanics in my congregation I now have to be aware of the growing racial diversity that exists in the community. In Gutierrez's book On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the

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[36]Cf. William Jones, "Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A critique of Washington, Cone, and Cleage," in Harvard Theological Review 64 (1971): 541-557.

Innocent there is fresh intuition concerning the suffering of the innocent. Gutierrez suggests that we reflect on the mystery of God's action in human suffering by beginning to assess all variables that influence our thoughts internally (i.e., social, political, economical, etc.,) and to explore God's self-communication through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures.

What theological methodology does Gutierrez suggest we use to develop this fresh insight for speaking about God? He suggest we use a twofold approach. First, Gutierrez suggests that we consider the relationship between revelation and gratuitousness.[37] Second, he considers the way or method of speaking about God.[38] Gutierrez points out that this radical liberation is revealed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that the revelation of God is revealed in God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Jesus constantly challenged the status quo, reframing their defiance

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[37]In like manner, Gutierrez, challenges the thinkers his day by saying, "Theology must be man's critical reflection of himself on his own basic principles...Theological reflection would then necessarily be a criticism of society and the Church insofar as they called and addressed by the Word of God;...Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it." Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 11.

[38]To this issue Gutierrez says, "It follows that the condition of being privileged addressees of revelation is the result not primarily of moral or spiritual dispositions but of human situation in which God undertakes self-revelation by acting and overturning values and criteria. The scorned of this world are those whom the God of love prefers." in Gutierrez, On Job, xii.

to his authority, because their moral values and politics of evil prohibited them from properly interpreting the law.[39] What is evident, however, is the critical process of doing theology. This process is hidden from the thought and methodology of Western dominant theology presented by the oppressor.[40] The choice that God made (i.e., to be on the side of the poor) is a righteous one by virtue of the fact that God is righteous. The suffering of the poor is not righteous because their cause is just, but it is just because God, who is righteous, is an active participant in the sufferings of the poor. Therefore, the way or method of speaking about God is understood by Gutierrez in terms of Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae, "...we cannot know what God is but only what God is not."[41]

Knowing who God is and what God is not is a central theme in Latin American and Black Liberation Theologies. How we talk about, reflect upon, and live out our apprehension of God finally determines how we know and understand God in the context of the struggle against suffering and evil. What methodology does one go through to apprehend God? First, as stated before, theology must be a part of the conversation, critical reflection and contemplation of one's environment and

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[39]Gutierrez, 194-203.

[40]Gutierrez, 220-231.

[41]Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 9, 3.

preaching must declare this activity.[42] In other words, theology without critical reflection and meditation towards praxis does not align itself with the God of the scriptures. Preaching which does not declare the praxis of liberation confines the mind and spirit of the listener. Praxis simply means the doing, action, or the practice of a discipline. Second, Gutierrez further suggests that the apprehension of the God of the scriptures be accomplished by the combination of "silence and speech."[43] Silence first, that one might hear what God is saying or about to say to the marginal people of the world, and then speak in response to a call to Christian responsibility to human need.

Similar to Gustavo Gutierrez, James H. Cone uses the Scriptures first and foremost in the foundation of Black Liberation Theology. From the Old Testament, Cone uses the stories of the Israelites, the chosen people of Yahweh, as the substantiation for development of a liberation theology for African-American people. Cone's hermeneutics suggests that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, is also the God of the oppressed everywhere. Cone identifies and compares the African-American struggles and sufferings with the same God of the Israelites,

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[42]To this Gutierrez says, "...God is first contemplated when we do God's will and allow God to reign; only after that do we think about God...contemplation and practice together make up a first act; theologizing is a second act.: in On Job, xiii.

[43]Gutierrez, On Job, xiii.

Yahweh, and the God of the Scriptures. The very nature or characteristics of God's being dictates that Yahweh of the Old Testament, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, continues to struggle for oppressed people everywhere. It is the obligation of the poor and the oppressed to struggle against injustice of any type anywhere in the world, since Yahweh is holy and is in opposition to the sin of injustice. It necessarily follows that the poor and the oppressed continue to struggle for survival if nothing else. This struggle is not necessarily a violent one, but is deemed righteous because the oppressed see this struggle as God's struggle as well.[44] As I began to understand Cone, it became increasingly clear and necessary for the oppressed to struggle for their liberation, because the Scriptures give the oppressed the license to voice their opposition to oppression (Prov.21.3; Amos 5.12-24). Cone and other liberation theologians use the Scriptures to show God's involvement in salvation history for the oppressed. However, central to the question of salvation history and human suffering is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This central question which

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[44]According to Cone, "The oppressed are called to fight against suffering by becoming God's suffering servants in the world...Therefore, when suffering is inflicted upon the oppressed it is evil and we must struggle against it. But when suffering arises out of the struggle...as in the fight against injustice, we accept it as a constituent of our calling and thus voluntarily suffer, because there is no freedom independent of the fight for justice." in James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), 177.

surrounds the ministry of Jesus ushers in the theology of the New Testament. Liberation theologians, such as Cone, use the New Testament extensively in their systematic theologies. For liberation theologians, the life of Jesus shows the involvement of God's promise to the disinherited, the marginal, the poor, and those who have suffered injustice, and the promise of Christ's involvement in salvation history as revealed through the law and the prophets. The cross revealed the extent to which God became involved in the suffering of the weak, and the resurrection of Jesus revealed the sign of God's victory over the suffering and death on the cross.

It is James Cone's contention that Western theology has been influenced too much by philosophy and too little by the Scriptures.[45] When I preach to my congregation, what Cone is suggesting is that the sermon narrative should spend more time describing the way out of evil rather than describing the conditions of evil. This method is consistent with reframing and second-order change, since reframing involves the activity of motivating an individual to change his perception of a crisis event.

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[45]Regarding this issue, Cone states, "Because western theology has been influenced too much by philosophy and too little by the Bible in its analysis of the problem of suffering, it has often contributed to the religious justification of unjust structures that oppress the poor. That is why theologians spend more time discussing metaphysical speculations about the origins of evil than showing what the oppressed must do in order to eliminate the social and political structures that create the evil." in Cone, Oppressed, 179.

Gutierrez approaches this area from the standpoint of critical reflection.[46] This reflection is what arises out of the believer who engages in the life of the oppressed and his/her understanding of the faith. According to Gutierrez, there is present in all believers a "rough outline of theology."[47] If this rough outline of theology means having a proper perspective of the moral and ethical obligations of a righteous Christian community, then one can proceed in the direction of hope. But, if this rough outline of theology is somehow distorted by greed and self satisfaction, oppression will be its end. If the former is meant, then and only then can one agree with Gutierrez that, "this foundation is not merely a jumping off point, but the soil into which theological reflection stubbornly and permanently sinks its roots and from which it derives its strengths."[48]

Liberation theology offered me a challenge to the traditional forms of Western theologies which have been

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[46]Gutierrez, Liberation, 3.

[47]Gutierrez, Liberation, 3.

[48]Gutierrez, Liberation, 3. It is here that Gutierrez disagrees somewhat with Cone on Philosophy. Gutierrez reflects on what Antonio Gramsci said of philosophy is also true of theology: "It is necessary to destroy the widely held prejudice that philosophy is something extremely difficult because it is the intellectual activity proper to a certain category of scientific specialists or professional systematic philosophies. It is necessary to show that all men are 'philosophers', establishing the parameters and characteristics of this 'spontaneous philosophy' proper to 'everyman', the notes of Gutierrez, p.15.

greatly influenced by Barth, Bultmann, Tillich and Calvin. It caused me to be sensitive to the real issue of injustices suffered by the oppressed in contrast with the metaphysical speculation taken by some writers like John H. Hick, Claremont Graduate School, and Stephen Davis, Claremont Men's College.[49] The problem of theodicy by these two authors is highly philosophical and almost void of any scriptural references. On the contrary, liberation theology maintains that the Scriptures are an important factor in determining the strength, stability, and identity in a community of faith. For the liberation theologian, the Bible is not a means to an end, but the Bible is the source and literary example of liberation for God's oppressed people. James Cone is very clear about the differences between the liberation approach and the philosophical approach to the problem of theodicy.[50] The liberation approach is an act of love and self denial. This act of liberation is witnessed when God intervenes in human history. The involvement in the struggle for liberation

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[49]Cf. the essays of these two authors in Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy, edited by Stephen Davis (Atlanta: John Knox Press: 1981). This work is good for philosophical reading and academic discussion, but offers little or not solutions to people who are suffering unjustly from organized and institutional evil.

[50]James Cone states, "...The Bible has little or no interest in rational explanations regarding the origins of evil. That evil exists is taken for granted. The focus is on what God has done, is doing, and will do to defeat the principalities and the powers of evil." in Cone God of the Oppressed, 179.

socially, economically, politically and the love for humanity is the nourishment and the fullness of faith.

Much of what I have discovered from liberation theology would be classified by Juan Luis Segundo as the hermeneutical circle. "The hermeneutical circle...is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal."[51] Segundo gives structure to the methodology used by both Cone and Gutierrez in their development of a new hermeneutic. Segundo says that there are two preconditions for such a circle. They are: "(1) profound and enriching questions and suspicions about our real situations; (2) a new interpretation of the Bible that is equally profound and enriching."[52] Within these preconditions, Segundo gives four factors that are decisive to the development of this methodology:

> Firstly, there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion.
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> Secondly, there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular.
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> Thirdly, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical

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[51]Cf. Juan Luis Segundo, The Liberation of Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 7-39. I find it hard to believe that Segundo does not have any of Gutierrez's work as part of the development of his thesis for the hermeneutical circle from the Latin American perspective.

[52]Segundo, Liberation, 9.

> suspicion, i.e., to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account.
>
> Fourthly, we have our new hermeneutic, i.e., our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the elements at our disposal.[53]

Clearly, one has no problem finding these stages in the writings of other liberation theologians. I have desperately tried to implement these stages within my preaching ministry and teaching ministry in a way that empowers the community. However, in reading Cone and Gutierrez during my days at Princeton, I had the sense that they had read Segundo before they wrote their works.[54] It is the community of faith and the victims who have experienced suffering and evil at its greatest levels and any hermeneutic of liberation should evolve out of their cries for justice. Because of this new hermeneutic, one immediately raises the question as to the salvific relevance of the origins and the existence of evil in the prevailing philosophical theodicies. Why is there not more theological narration from the victims of evil and human suffering?

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[53]Segundo, Liberation, 9. Cf. also James Cone, "Divine Liberation and Black Suffering, "in God of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), and Gustavo Gutierrez On Job (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), for the development of this hermeneutical circle.

[54]Segundo, The Liberation of Theology is the development of a series of lectures given by Segundo while enlisted as Visiting Professor at Harvard Divinity School.

The voice of the victim is expressed so vividly in Gutierrez's book On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent. Using the methodology of the hermeneutical circle, Gutierrez devotes an entire book to the exegesis of the Book of Job. He treats most of the classical themes in the problem of theodicy:

> "...the transcendence of God, the problem of evil, human suffering, the question of retribution, friendship, and others:...the question...how are we to talk about God from within a specific situation--namely, the suffering of the innocent...The innocence that Job vigorously claims for himself helps us to understand the innocence of an oppressed and believing people amid the situation of suffering and death that has been forced upon it."[55]

Common ground is reached when the Book of Job is discussed by Cone and Gutierrez. Cone cites Job as a reference to human suffering, while Gutierrez uses Job as a paradigm of the suffering citizen of God trying to answer the question of retribution, the problem of evil, human suffering, friendship, and the reality of a transcendent God. But, Cone reveals for us a critical response to how one talks of God in the midst of human suffering. It is found in Job 31:35, "Let the Almighty answer me!" This audacious challenge by Job is interpreted by Cone as response out of the problem of human suffering.

The answers that Yahweh gave were not according to Job's definition of the problem of suffering. God transposes the

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[55]Gutierrez, On Job, xviii.

issue to another level, emphasizing divine power and knowledge in contrast to human weakness and ignorance..."Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding." (Job 38:4 RSV)[56] Two things happen here: first, God uses second-order change and reframes Job's condition. Second, James Cone points out to us the radical way in which God speaks to us in our human suffering---in silence. Could it be that liberation theologians and preachers have missed this all important concept? Or could this be a restating of an old truth? Perhaps Leonardo Boff is making a similar statement when he says,

God must be sought sub contrario. Where God seems not to be, where God seems to have withdrawn, there we shall find God most intensely present. This logic contradicts the logic of reason. This is the logic of the cross. The logic of the cross is a scandal to reason, and must be maintained as such, then and only then shall we have this access to God.[57] If we consistently try to use the tool of logic in a situation where logic has no foundation whatsoever, then we are bound to come to illogical conclusions every time. At the cross, it is

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[56]Cf. James Cone, God of the Oppressed, 169. Cone is the only liberation theologian that I know of who treats Job in this manner. The very idea of approaching the problem of theodicy by allowing God to speak to and through the victim is revolutionary and transforming. More work needs to be done in theology on how God speaks to human suffering---in silence and/or vocally.

[57]Cf. Leonardo Boff, Passion of Christ, Passion of the World (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 109.

natural for us to run and hide from its pain and suffering, but God reframes our fears and draws us to the cross. Therefore, the metaphysical approaches to the solutions to the problems of theodicy that often end in frustration, do so because the wrong methodology is being used. Then, what should we look for? As a pastor, who sees young people shot down in the streets of the inner-city for wearing expensive tennis shoes; or a young man brutally shot by police after being handcuffed because they thought he had a gun, and the questions are endless, how do I explain the horror of this evil? According to Boff and other liberation theologians, we should look for where God is not logical, in other words, where God does not follow the tenets of Aristotelian logic, such as the cross. At the cross is where liberation theologians, both Latin and African-American converge. The cross represents God's salvific action in humanity. "The cross and the resurrection are the seal of our liberty."[58] The cross represents the extent of God's involvement with humanity. Therefore, the atonement for our misunderstanding, and anger directed towards God for allowing the innocent to suffer, is taken care of through the death of Jesus on the cross. The cross is where God speaks to us as God spoke to

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[58]Cf. Gutierrez, The Theology of Liberation, 300. Very little information could be found in this book concerning the cross. See also, Gutierrez On Job and The Power of the Poor in History (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 52.

Job in his suffering. As Job did not comprehend the logic of God, likewise we also are ignorant of the mysteries of God.[59] It is illogical to evaluate God's activity solely on the basis of retribution, because the cross is also God's identification with the poor and the oppressed (2Cor. 8.9 RSV). This pericope from the Corinthian correspondence depicts the choice that God made to communicate and identify with the poor. God's choice to be where the poor live becomes a divine decision to suffer for a just cause. It becomes a decision to be where most choose not to be. God's presence in the midst of the poor and the oppressed should settle the problems of theodicy, especially the question where is God when you need God the most? God is in the midst taking the sting out of death.[60] During the course of the struggle for liberation,

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[59]Cf. Cone, God of the Oppressed, 175. The cross of Jesus reveals the extent of God's involvement in the suffering of the weak. He is not merely sympathetic with the social pain of the poor, but becomes totally identified with them in their agony and pain. The pain of the oppressed is God's pain, for he takes their suffering as his own, thereby freeing them from its ultimate control of their lives...The resurrection...is the sign of God's victory over suffering on the cross. The oppressed are set free to struggle politically against the imposed injustice of rulers...

[60]To this solidarity, Cf. Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 52. See also Leonardo Hoff Passion of Christ, Passion of the World (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 115. Boff gives an example of the God who suffers on the cross, "Here is the meaning of God on the cross, a God in pain. Here is the meaning of a 'pathetic theology,' In this vision, courageous poverty, decision, outrage, and suffering win a divine dimension---not to numb our awareness in the struggle with the crucified can we struggle against the cross, only in identification with the victims of tribulations can there be

there is always at least one person who will raise the question: if God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed, and I do not consider myself in either class, then where does this leave me in relationship to God? Any person who raises this kind of question should be challenged not to be concerned about whose side God is on, but whether they are on God's side---where God is doing God's work.[61] Another reason that the position of God is problematic for some is because they have not yet encountered God.[62] Those who do not consider themselves as a participant in the struggle against evil on the behalf of the oppressed and therefore, they may find themselves as participants in the evil and suffering that

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real liberation from tribulation. And this was Jesus'; road, the path of God incarnate." This too should be our road, self-denial and total involvement.

[61]For an excellent approach to this dilemma see, Frederick Herzog, God-Walk: Liberation Shaping Dogmatics (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 41.

[62]Cf. James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed, 182-183. Here Cone emphasizes the need for the oppressed to struggle against injustice for without the struggle the suffering inflicted becomes a positive force to deal with and leads to passivity and submission. See also, Gutierrez The Power of the Poor in History, 52, "It is only through concrete deeds of love in solidarity that our encounter with the poor person, with the explicited human being, will be effective---in that person our encounter with Christ, and through them with Christ (for "you did it to me"---Matt. 25:40) will be valid as well. Our denial of love and solidarity will be rejection of Christ ("you neglected to do it to me"---Matt. 25:45). The poor in this involvement is a life in the presence of the Lord at the heart of political activity, with all its conflict, and with all its demand for scientific reasoning, It is the life of---contemplative in political action..."

marginalizes liberation.

In tension with theodicy is the question of God's omnipotence. The tension is in the query that if God is on the side of the oppressed and the poor, then why isn't God's side victorious, since the claim is that God is all-powerful? At first glance one is tempted to draw upon philosophical conclusions for suitable responses.[63] Leonardo Boff pushes the attribute of the omnipotence of God to its theological limits by stating, "To say that God is love is to say that God is vulnerable."[64] The vulnerability of God in liberation theology is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of the worlds rejection of a God who chooses to love and be with the oppressed and the poor. Still another response is to doubt

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[63]In Encountering Evil: Live Option in Theodicy, (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 2, edited by Stephen Davis. The introduction presents some basic theistic beliefs. The most controversial of these beliefs is the belief concerning the omnipotence of God. It is here that the line of demarcation is drawn with respect to the attributes of God. Not many who claim to be Christians would have a problem with whether God exist or not, or whether God is good, or whether God is a personal Being, but what is problematic is God's ability or inability to deliver from the power of evil, i.e., God's omnipotence. To this debate Stephen Davis adds, "that God is omnipotent at a certain point in time if and only if for any logically possible state of affairs' is coherent, then God can bring about that state of affairs at that time." The logical and rational interpretation of God's omnipotence has already been presented in this essay, and I disagree with Davis' approach.

[64]Boff, Passion, 114.

the very existence of God in the midst of suffering and evil.[65] Nevertheless, it is in our weakness that God is made strong. This strength and presence that God brings to the suffering of poor and oppressed peoples makes enduring the pain worthwhile. The worthiness of human suffering for the oppressed, the marginal and the poor is not a reductionistic approach to a complex problem, but it brings value to the life of a people who otherwise would have no value in life.[66] Hence, the challenge for those who identify with the oppressed, the marginal and the poor and those who are not themselves considered to be oppressed are to be cognizant of the prophetic voice that cries for these people.[67]

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[65]James Cone give an historical account of what African-American people felt during the era of slavery in America and also what they were feeling during the 60's and 70's.

[66]To this issue, Boff states, "Suffering is worthy of the human being when it is for the sake of a just cause. A cause is just when it seeks justice for the exploited, when it pursues the rights of the exploited against the legality of a distorted civil order, against the tenacity of an imposed system. An oppressive system will always try to make itself look like a meaningful totality, as from the problems of the people. But, such a system tramples human dignity under foot reduces human beings to things, exiles them as non-persons.

[67]Cf. Raul Vidales, "How Shall We Speak of Christ Today?" Ch.11, Jose Miquez Bonino, ed., Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 137-161. One passage is of particular importance not only to Latin theologies but also to Black theologies, "The theology of liberation has need of a hermeneutic that will listen not only to the voice of the science (i.e., economics, sociology, psychology, etc.,) that will help it to better understand the biblical world, but also, and with greater urgency, to the language of the people, the culture of the oppression, the geography of hunger in the politicized totality of Latin American, and the structure of an unjust social order in need

Unless, as a pastor, I become sensitive to the prophetic voice of the poor and the oppressed many in the community that I serve will continue to suffer. The prophetic voice of the oppressed community can serve as a reframer for me providing second-order change from proclamation to providing programs that alleviate suffering. A passive response to the cries of the poor and the oppressed can be interpreted as a participation in their oppression (Matt.25:31-46 RSV). Listening and hearing the voice of the oppressed is not sufficient to liberate them from their oppressors, but it is imperative that a strategy of participation be developed to assure the poor that their cries are not in vain.

Why is it that preachers and other professionals often missed the voices of the suffering and the oppressed? In order to give an answer to this question, one needs to understand the extent of God's involvement in the suffering of humanity. God's involvement was a sacrifice, a self-giving sacrifice, and is seen in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Those who claim to be followers must do so as Jesus commanded. Furthermore, one does not give sacrificially without becoming fully knowledgeable of the consequences involved in the exchange of personhood. It is this self awareness that is the controlling factor in God's Being, because God is aware of God's self, there cannot be any

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of the message of freedom now." The parentheses in this quote are mine.

contradictions in the Being of God.

The tension of talking about God's omnipotence (i.e., theodicy, in this case God's ability or inability to eliminate suffering and evil) apart from simultaneously considering God's omniscience (the perfection of divine wisdom), and God's omnipresence (the creativity and presence of God in everything) does not pose for some a difficult picture in which to construct a benevolent Being. The tension is exacted upon those who speak about God instead of letting God speak for God's self. The Trinity is One, therefore, it becomes impossible to talk of God's omnipotence apart from God's omnipresence and God's omniscience. The existence of God is self regulated, that is, God's omniscience and omnipresence is always in harmony with God's omnipotence, while God's omniscience is in harmony with the omnipotence and the omnipresence of God, and so on.[68]

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[68]This systemic theological development evolved out of my own personal struggles with the concept of the Trinity, especially as it relates directly to my work as a pastor trying to use some of the thoughts of liberation theologians. Much of the foundation for this thought comes from my undergraduate degree in philosophy and philosophical theology of John Macquarrie Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 256, offers an alternative to the definition to the work 'omnipotent.' He states, "...omnipotence...it means that God risks himself, so to speak, with the nothing; he opens himself and pours himself out into nothing. His very essence is to let be, to confer being. He lets be by giving himself, for he is Being; and in giving himself in this way, he places himself in jeopardy, for he takes the risk that Being may be dissolved in nothing...One would have to say, however, that this weakness of God is his strength...only this God is a God of love, for love is precisely his self-giving and letting-be...So we may believe that even where God appears in weakness---or better, precisely

One must understand that in the context of liberation theology, the self-giving of God does not mean that there is an end to God's resources (Being). God is love, and it is through the giving of love that God is perpetuated. God is love to the marginal, the poor, the oppressed and the disinherited even when they do not love themselves or love God in return. It is unconditional love that sustains humanity with God. The most difficult aspect of the reframing ministry of Christ is the challenge to love your enemies. Up to this point the responsibility has largely been on the oppressor to respond to the poor and the oppressed with a measure of equality (i.e., social, political, economical, and racial). Something must be said for the responsibility of the oppressed to the oppressor. The teachings of Christ tells us to control unbridled hatred for our enemies. Unbridled hatred could be the oppressed's response for being constantly abused by society. How do you love when you are being starved to death, unjustly imprisoned, ostracized for no other reason than the color of your skin, tortured physically and mentally and robbed of your humanity? This kind of love can only be generated through the Being that is love with total surrender to God's shekinah[69] in the presence of your enemies.

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there---he also manifests his invincible power."

[69]The word 'shekinah' is used in the same sense that Gutierrez uses it in A Theology of Liberation to characterize a type of relationship, 190. Also, from note 4: "This Hebrew word *(Shekinah)* should be translated by 'indwelling' rather

It is naïve to believe that all evil and suffering can be eliminated. However, as stated earlier in this essay, it is the goal and the objective of the poor and the oppressed to struggle against the injustices that afflict them until that which persecutes them is eliminated. This work can be construed by some as an eschatological attempt towards a present reality. Nevertheless, the pain, the suffering, the homelessness, the drugs, the homophobia, the guns and gang violence, the racism and political deceptions are still with us. Whose responsibility is it to address these questions in our communities concerning the problems of theodicy and eschatology? Why is there not more theological narration from the victims of human suffering?

The cultural and ethnic differences of John Macquarrie and James H. Cone contribute to their overall understanding of suffering from a theological viewpoint. Cone and Macquarrie once studied Barth, Bultmann, Heidegger, and Tillich. Both Cone and Macquarrie have participated in the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York. James Cone is presently the Charles H. Briggs Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary. John Macquarrie was professor of systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York before assuming his present position as Lady Margaret

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than by 'presence'. It indicates that God takes up his abode in some given place and dwells there. While the word 'presence' does not imply and place, any attachment, any preference, 'indwelling' presupposes that there has been a choice of a place in which to remain."

Professor of Divinity at Oxford University.

Although Cone and Macquarrie show similarities in their theological background, their ethnicity is the compelling force for their theological approach to suffering. While James Cone addresses topics concerning Black Theology, John Macquarrie addresses theological issues from the philosophical approach of Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann.

First and foremost, the Bible is the foundation for Cone's deliberation on African American suffering. In the Old Testament, the stories of the Israelites as the chosen people of Yahweh act as motivation and substantiation for paralleling the struggles of African American people. In the New Testament, the life of Jesus shows the extent of Yahweh's involvement in the suffering of the weak, and the resurrection of Jesus reveals the sign of God's victory over the suffering on the cross.

Secondly, it is Cone's contention that Western theology has been influenced too much by philosophy and too little by the Bible. In my opinion, this is one of Macquarrie's weaknesses. Regarding this issue, Cone says,

> Because Western theology has been influenced too much by philosophy and too little by the Bible in its analysis of the problem of suffering, it has often contributed to the religious justification of unjust structures that oppress the poor. That is why theologians spend more time discussing metaphysical speculations about the origins of evil than to eliminate the social and political

structures that create the evil.[70]

In the other theological works of Cone, he challenges Western theologies, like Macquarrie, who have been influenced by Barth, Bultmann, Tillich and Heidegger to be sensitive to the real issue of the injustices suffered by the oppressed in contrast with the metaphysical and the philosophical speculation taken by Macquarrie in some of his works. Macquarrie would agree that the Scriptures of a community are an important factor in determining the strength, stability and identity of the community itself. Cone summarizes by saying,

> ...Black Theology's perspective...is based on the Scripture and Black experience which claim that the God of Jesus is the Liberator of the oppressed from oppression. Although the continued existence of suffering offers a serious challenge to the biblical and black faith, it does not negate it. The reason is found in Jesus Christ who is God's decisive Word of Liberation in our experience that makes it possible to struggle for freedom because we know that God is struggling too.[71]

Two things must be said here. First, Cone's notion that Yahweh also is struggling is definitely a challenge to the traditional approach of the doctrines of divine providence. Traditional doctrines depict Yahweh as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. But, it is essential for Cone to know that the God of the oppressed is a participant in the poor's struggle for justice through the life, death, and

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[70]Cf. James Cone, God of the Oppressed, 179, and The Spiritual and the Blues (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 72.

[71]James Cone, God of the Oppressed, 194.

resurrection of Jesus Christ. The life and struggle of Jesus of Nazareth is seen in his rejection by his own people. The death of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross at Calvary is in solidarity with the death and suffering of the poor and oppressed who accept his call of whosoever will let them come. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth implies that the poor, oppressed and suffering of humanity have the capability of overcoming personal difficulties by following Christ.

Secondly, for Cone, the Bible is not a means to an end, but the Bible is the source and literary example of liberation for Yahweh's oppressed people. James Cone remarks that "the Bible has little or no interest in rational explanations regarding the origins of evil. That evil exists is taken for granted."[72]

The main difference between Macquarrie and Cone is that Macquarrie continuously speaks of suffering in phenomenal terms, such as in action, pain, frustration, deprivation, failure, loss, guilt, and proxy (i.e., vicarious suffering). Suffering by inaction is the one form that coincides with the thought of James Cone. Inaction involves the imposed suffering from a source outside of a person's ability to manage their freedom. The remaining terms are social, phenomenal and are consistently used by the oppressor to indicate that the problem of suffering for oppressed people is

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[72]James Cone, God of the Oppressed, 179.

primarily their fault.

Macquarrie states that "suffering is regarded as an unqualified evil, and every effort is made to eliminate it."[73]

Cone would agree that evil should be eliminated at all cost. However, Cone would ask the question: What is unqualified evil? When is evil (i.e., suffering and injustice for the oppressed community) qualified or unqualified? Both Cone and Macquarrie would agree that the life of Jesus of Nazareth was redemptive for humankind. Yet, they differ on the role that suffering plays in the formation of humanity. Macquarrie also says that suffering is educational for society. This would indicate that some forms of suffering in Macquarrie's system cannot be removed for the benefit of future enhancement of society. For Macquarrie, suffering is the negative result of the risk that God took in creativity. It is part of the structure of being, and therefore it is somewhat unrealistic to expect that suffering can be eliminated. This does not mean that one should not try. On the other hand, Cone is pressing hard for elimination of injustice sociologically, politically, economically, racially, and ecumenically.

In conclusion, my theological response to the legacy and reality of African American suffering is from the standpoint of praxis. I believe that it is my responsibility, as a

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[73]John Macquarrie, In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach (New York: Crossroad Company, 1983), 230.

pastor of an African American congregation, to enlighten, inform, instruct, sustain, heal, liberate, assist in a quest for the meaning of suffering/life and empower the congregation to the importance and the need of positive transformation from negative implications. Furthermore, I must participate in the suffering that arises out of the struggle for justice within the African American community accepting the constituents of my calling for peace and reconciliation. As a theologian, I am obligated to redefine suffering in the African American community in terms of the violence that dehumanizes my people on a daily basis. Any act that attempts to dehumanize or to detract from my personhood or the personhood of the African American community is considered as violence and causes suffering on many levels. If there is an educative role for suffering, can it be that the oppressor can learn from the oppressed that oppression only breeds more violence?

Ethics, Violence and Suffering

Suffering is a fundamental existential condition in the life of every human being whether voluntarily or involuntarily pursued. What is rarely discussed are the ethical issues that also shape our community and inform our spiritual and psychic existence. One might raise the moral issue that economic, political, and social ramifications seem to be the deciding factors when it comes to feeding starving people in Bosnia, Haiti, or Rwanda. No one would argue at length the issue of

rescuing a neighbor from a burning house; then providing warmth, shelter, and food as an act of love until s/he is properly lodged. Ethics is more than knowing the 'right thing' to do, it is doing the 'right thing'. To do the 'right thing' is to do the 'just thing.' No one can be ethical and not be just. To be ethical means to be just.

For a moment, let us consider the epic story of the Garden of Eden when Yahweh made 'Adam' (humankind) the responsible-moral agent of creation. As responsible-moral agent, all ethical, political, economical, and social responsibilities were placed under Adam's jurisdiction. Thus, Eve's disobedience was ultimately Adam's (humankind's) failure as responsible-moral agent to Yahweh and creation. One might say that Adam (humankind) was obligated, commissioned, and directed by Yahweh to be just when dispensing his authority. It was impossible for Adam (humankind) to be obedient, obligated, and responsible morally to Yahweh without providing justice in the process. Since Yahweh is just, there is an expectation on Yahweh's part that responsible-moral agents provide justice. This expectation of Yahweh is passed on to the progeny of Adam, namely humanity.

There is a moral significance to the suffering of humanity. This significance is rooted in the neglect by responsible-moral agents to fulfill obligations owed to Yahweh. These obligations are moral duties that are necessary to the survival and needs of society. Moral duty is more than

the capacity to think clearly, to logically appraise the crisis, form committees and outreach in communities, speak out against evil, and provide financial support. It is the capacity to see the evil and sin that plagues the world. It is having the eye of a prophet standing on the wall declaring what of the night. It is seeing the suffering, the violence, and declaring it unjust.

This author disagrees in part with Stanley Hauerwas who states in his book Naming the Silence: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering that it is impossible to come in contact with possible solutions to the problem of suffering without a life-narrative. These life-narratives are stories located in God's narrative, namely the Scriptures.

Let us assume for a moment that what Hauerwas states is true. Sola Scriptus becomes the operative plan of God to teach the lessons of faith, morality, and suffering. But, Adam (humankind), who was responsible for the management of creation, did not have the benefit of Sola Scriptus to make judgements. Since Adam (humankind) was the first life-narrative or story located in God's narrative, and if Adam (humankind) was to have dominion over the earth, then one must conclude that there must have been something other than Sola Scriptus. If one avoids this alternative, then the other is to believe that God set Adam up to have dominion over the earth without a clue of how to go about this moral task. The Stanley Hauerwas theory seems fallacious at best.

The moral and ethical responsibility to follow God's commandments are the duty of the responsible-moral agent. Ethics must not be external, subordinant, dependent, attached, adjunct, deduced or an appendant to theology. If theology is to be legitimate and ethical theory moral and just, then the two must be a unified entity. For this reason, James Cone's, Gustavo Gutierrez's, Jurgen Moltmann's, and Juan Segundo's liberation theologies are so important to theology proper. These theologians have incorporate an ethical voice within their work that cries out for justice.

The ethical voice of liberation theology in many ways has changed for ever the way in which we do theology, by allowing justice to speak for all people particularly the marginal and disenfranchised. Prior to liberation theology's ethical voice, the oppressed waited patiently in their suffering and the pain for the voice of the dominant culture's theology to stop vacillating around the oppressed and respond to the call of justice. The response has been minimal at best.

The ethical voice of liberation theology is a constant threat to evil. Evil labels liberation theology as Marxist, Left-wing, liberal, and subversive to hungry seminarian minds. Perhaps this is the reason few seminaries offer courses in liberation theology, and those that do offer liberation theology, do so as an aside.

CHAPTER 5

A CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT: THE COMMUNITY OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY IN MARYLAND AND HUNTER MEMORIAL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A Brief History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

Richard Allen, the architect of African Methodism, was born a slave in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on February 14, 1760. As a young child, he was sold to the owner the Stokely Farm near Dover, Delaware.

In the year 1777, the 17-year old Allen, filled with the spirit of God, was converted to Christianity. His dedication to the Christian faith allowed him to convert his master, who later allowed him to purchase the freedom of himself and his brother. As a determined servant of God, Allen's zeal for his newly found faith inspired him to spread the gospel throughout the Black community. His preaching and teaching of Christian self worth allowed him to be looked upon as a persevering leader of the oppressed Black people.

After settling in Philadelphia, Richard Allen, along with other free Blacks, joined St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. In the early days, they were allowed to worship with the White parishioners and assisted in building the church's gallery. It was an awesome Sunday morning when Allen,

Absolom Jones and William White were kneeling in prayer when they were pulled from their knees and told to retreat to the gallery. The gentlemen did not protest. They simply asked to be allowed to complete their prayers and vowed to trouble the congregation no more.

Led by a courageous Allen in 1787, slaves and free persons set forth to establish the Free African Society; out of which the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed. A few years later in 1793, Allen purchased an old blacksmith shop at Sixth and Lombard Streets. This was to be a place for people to read and write, as well as promoting Christian Education throughout the Black community. In 1816 Allen was consecrated the first Bishop of the A.M.E. Church. Equipped with two spiritual weapons, sublime courage and indestructible faith, Allen continually brought souls to Christ, while promoting human freedom.

In conclusion, it must be stipulated, Allen was the pre-eminent leader and organizer of the Black population in the dawn of the 19th Century. He was an "apostle of freedom", as well as a courageous leader willing to fight for principles at all times. In a land of slaves, Allen created and nurtured an organization which gave desired to worship at a church where: no differences were made between bond and free; there was no loss service according to one's capacities was open to all. Allen planted a seed whose roots spread throughout the world and whose tendrils have grown stronger with passing years.

Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, died in 1831.

Richard Allen could not have grown, matured and become the effective leader that he was without the love and concern and help of others. Among those who stood with him all the way, none was more helpful and valuable than Sarah Allen, his beloved wife. Neither the biography of Richard Allen nor the history of the A.M.E. Church can be accurately written without giving a high and noble place of honor to this saintly woman, Sarah Allen.

She was born in the Isle of Wight County, VA, in 1764 and was brought to Philadelphia when she was united in marriage to Richard Allen on August 18, 1801, by Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, Pastor of Old St. George Methodist Episcopal Church. To this marriage six children were born - four boys and two girls. Sarah Allen was a noble character in her own rights. The Register Book at Old St. George Church says of her that she "...gave all the assistance she could to several families, for which she did not receive anything; and when anything was offered her, she left it to the option of those she served."

She was a remarkable wife and devoted mother, and an invaluable help to Richard Allen as he ventured upon the daring task of organizing people of African descent into what has eventually become the A.M.E. Church in particular, and the Black Church in general.

Sarah Allen was the first woman missionary in the A.M.E.

Church. Her first missionary project was to look after the physical condition of the preachers whom her husband sent out on the field. Many of them returned in very poor physical condition and Sarah Allen organized the women of the church to mend their clothes and provide hot nourishing meals when they came to make their reports.

In addition to rendering this much needed service in the interest of the preachers, Sarah stood by the side of her dedicated and consecrated husband, and encouraged him in his fight for complete freedom for his people. She was a true and dependable staff upon whom the Bishop could lean at any time and feel absolutely secure.

Mother Allen, as she is affectionately remembered, was 85 years of age when she was called from labor to reward on July 16, 1849. "Her name will ever be associated with and endeared by the A.M.E. Church, and by the Christian Church as a whole. She will ever remain the true Mother of African Methodism.

A History of Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church as Part of the A.M.E. Church

Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded and organized in 1897 under the name of the African Methodist Episcopal Mission Church. The early African-American congregation emerged out of a desire in Suitland for a church of their own in the community. The original members were Mr. Harper, Mr. Butler and Mrs. Ann Lynn. Before these

individuals decided to form a church, they met regularly in the home of Mr. Harper where they conducted prayer meetings and other spiritual events. His home is located on what is now Dupont Avenue in Suitland, just blocks away from where the present church now stands.

Hunter's first pastor was the Reverend Batter. Nothing could be found in the church or community records about his place of birth, education, time served as minister, or death. However, the records indicated that the congregation desperately struggled to obtain some property they could use for worship. After much prayer, a Judge Cox, who recognized their need for a regular place of worship, donated an old shed on some property in Suitland.

The people came together and renovated the shed as best they could with a modest membership. They soon began to experience a small increase in growth. In 1910, the church was officially named Hunter Memorial and was admitted into the Baltimore Annual Conference that same year. There are no records that tell who Hunter was and why the church was named for her/him. Several attempts have been made to discover this historic information but to no avail. However, some speculate that it was the name of a Presiding Elder Hunter who officiated during this period.

In 1929, the church leaders began to evangelize the community to increase the membership. As this became a reality, it became apparent that the little red shed being

used was inadequate for the new church growth, therefore the shed was leveled and abandoned. A new site which the members liked was obtained and purchased; one acre of land (which has become the present location of Hunter).

In 1932, the Reverend Curtis came to Hunter with a vision to build a new church. The members worked diligently with him to construct a new edifice in the same year. Mrs. Ann ("Mother Lynn") Lynn was very faithful in coming to the church early before service to make fires in the winter and ring the church bell before the services would start. Her daughter, Serena Lynn Hawkins, was faithful in giving concerts to help support the church financially.

The ensuing twenty years was a continual struggle to keep the church alive. The 1930's and 1940's were not good years financially, and while the small group had faith and zeal, the economic situation of the times was against them. Successive pastors who struggled courageously to keep the church going during this period included the Reverends Baddy, Green, Lewis, Fields and Simms.

It was under the leadership of the Reverend Jesse Simms (who was appointed by Bishop Hemingway in 1948) that the church finally had to close its doors in 1952. In spite of his efforts and support of a dwindling membership, the Reverend Jesse Simms' efforts were overtaken by the circumstances of that time. The community surrounding Hunter was predominately Catholic in those days, nevertheless, all

the pastors that were sent to Hunter worked very hard in the church community to keep the doors open, but in the face of trying times and no members, the doors were forced to close. Mrs. Ann Lynn's fighting spirit is especially remembered during those days.

The spirit of the people of Hunter did not die. It took six years, however, for the people of Hunter to start over again. In 1958, a young, eager and determined minister, the Reverend Leon G. Lipscombe, was assigned to rebuild the church and the membership. The Reverend Leon G. Lipscombe endeared himself to the community and the church, and in five years was able to build a new church and increase the membership. The church continued to grow slowly when they saw what he was trying to do. The Reverend Lipscombe built the original building in which the church presently worships. The Reverend Mark Green followed the Reverend Leon G. Lipscombe as Hunter's pastor.

In 1968, the Reverend George A. Manning was assigned to lead the congregation. The Reverend Manning's assignment to Hunter seemed to be the right combination to bring out the best in the members of the congregation and the community. The dedication and hard work of the Reverend Manning was able to overcome the hard facts of reality in which he found the church of twelve members. With the few men that were members, he worked at night to complete the painting and plastering of the interior walls of the building that the Reverend Lipscombe

had started. He worked on Saturdays and holidays to clear the entangled vines, weeds, and debris that surrounded the church building. Within the first year of his tenure the membership doubled.

The Sunday School was controlled by the Suitland Civic Association. In 1969, the Reverend George A. Manning moved the Sunday School from the Suitland Civic Association into the church. This decision caused some disagreement between those who were in control of the Sunday School and the Reverend Manning. Most of those Sunday School leaders did not come into the church because of this decision and consequently joined other churches. The Sunday School was re-organized by the pastor to adjust for the change in leadership.

Over the next ten years, the Reverend George A. Manning experienced a continued growth in membership which necessitated him to build and add on to the present church building a new multi-purpose hall, five classrooms, a commercial kitchen, and brick veneer facelift of the current edifice. The membership grew during this period to five hundred.

The Reverend George A. Manning was elevated to the position of Presiding Elder of the Potomac District of the Washington Annual Conference by Bishop John Hurst Adams, following the death of Presiding Elder Mattison in 1988. Bishop John H. Adams assigned the Reverend Michael O'Dell Thomas, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, as the

new pastor of Hunter Memorial. His ministry is complemented by his wife, the Reverend Debyii Sababu-Thomas, a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School and Ph.D. candidate at Howard University School of Communications. She is also an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Both ministers claim Bethel African Methodist Church, Baltimore, Maryland under the Reverend Doctor John Richard Bryant as their home church and mentor respectively.

This ministerial team has expressed a visible display of energy and charisma that has propelled the membership from 500 to 900 in four years. This enormous leadership task is accomplished through the assistance of 15 ministers and 80 class leaders, most of whom entered the ministry under the Reverend Thomas' ministry at Hunter. In addition, the Reverend Thomas has had to re-organize Hunter administratively to accommodate the rapid growth.

Furthermore, during my tenure as pastor, an eight o'clock worship service was started. With the aid of a federal government conference grant, I initiated a youth empowerment mentoring program called Kiamsha, which is Swahili for "that which awakens me." A Kiamsha Youth Empowerment Conference was held in November, 1992 at the University of Maryland College Park Conference Center and over 400 youth and adults participated. The conference was designed to empower young people to train other young people in the dangers of alcohol and other abusive substances. The Reverend Bernice King, the

daughter of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the keynote speaker. As part of this program, a group of youth from Hunter and the community went through a Rites of Passage.

Hunter continues to be very active in the community with organizations such as the Interfaith Action Communities (a multi-denominational and racial community actin group in which Hunter is a charter member), the NAACP, and the Allen Outreach Center of Washington, DC.

Hunter Memorial has continued to grow to the extent that expansion is imperative and being planned. Consideration is being given to enlarging the present building site to accommodate 900 to 1,000 people in the sanctuary. The plans are to include additional classroom space, meeting rooms, and other facilities. In December, 1992, the trustees of Hunter purchased the first parsonage in the history of the church for the pastor and his family which is located in the prestigious Fort Washington community of Prince George's County.

In 1994, Hunter Memorial 'burned the mortgage on the church' (i.e., paid off the indebtedness and had a service of commemoration), and worked to elect one of its members to the Prince George's County Council.[74]

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[74]Councilwoman Dorothy Bailey was elected to the 7th Councilmactic District of the county which includes the area surrounding Hunter Memorial. In addition, she is a context associate of this project and a former Director of the Kiamsha Project discussed in this work. Councilwoman Bailey is the first person in the history of Hunter to be elected to public office.

Contextual Analysis

The attendance and worship membership for Hunter was not kept accurately for six decades. In fact, several years of data have been destroyed and permanently lost due to a lack of archival space and neglect. However, over the past 5 years every attempt has been made to correct the problem. Recently, the membership has experienced a 67% increase with 50 conversions, and an average of 26 have been baptized each year.

It is also helpful to note that 30% of Hunter's membership is under 25 years of age. This factor is an asset, as well as, a liability. In terms of an asset: (1) the youthful nature of the congregation represent the continuous growth within the church, (2) the young adults represent a younger family unit that will be supportive and productive, over the years, and (3) the youth, under the direction of Christian education, assures a stronger congregation in the future. However, in terms of liabilities: (1) the youth and young adults require much more attention and quality time in terms of ministry, (2) young adults have a tendency to move frequently without proper notification which often leads to discrepancies in the record keeping, and (3) the youth/young adults in the age bracket of 19 to 25 years of age historically do not support the church in a financial way. In addition this age group brings an element of concern that escapes most congregation, namely violence and poverty.

According to Fig. 10, in 1985 the national poverty rate was 14.5%, however, in Fig. 4 for the same period 20.1% were children in poverty. In the Washington Metropolitan area for the same period 28.5% of all children lived in poverty. Clearly, a disproportionate number of children in and around Washington are disadvantaged which may attribute to the high rate of crime and violence in the same area. Hunter Memorial has a moral obligation, as expressed in Chapter 4 "Ethics, Violence, and Suffering," to become involved in the lives of these children. Kiamsha Youth Empowerment Program, discussed in the previous section of this chapter, was formed to address this problem.

In fig. 4, note that the 1988 teenage violent death rate in the D.C. area was 165.9 per 100,000 children ages 15-19 while nationally it was only 69.7 per 100,000 children. In every area over the last decade there has been a steady decline in the social and economic conditions nation wide and the District of Columbia Metropolitan area ranked worst in most categories. Children in this area are 16.7% more likely to be under twenty years of age unmarried and have a child out-of-wedlock, twice the national average for infant mortality, and six times the national incarceration rate when the child is ten years of age and older (see Fig. 4 for more detail). This age group traditionally has been responsible for a disproportionate quota of violent crime, but the situation has worsened over the last decade. In Fig.5, the

arrest rates for whites nationally have doubled, while that of blacks has multiplied 3.5 times. In addition, the age for violent offenders among African Americans is getting younger each year. Since 1985, youths under 18 committed 92% of the violent crime. Part of this problem is due to the failure of the criminal justice system to keep violent offenders off the streets of our cities. Fig. 6 indicates that most inmates are released after serving only a third of their sentence, while on the average murderers serve under seven years of their sentence.

Twenty years ago, this influx of young adults was not a phenomenon to be considered, therefore, it has now become a new challenge for all the officers at Hunter. The challenge has become one of creatively intervening into the crises that face our in Prince George's County. Twenty years ago, most of the members were 45 years of age and older (this information was provided by my predecessor, the Reverend George A. Manning, who led the congregation for 25 years).

The average member of Hunter is between the ages of 25 and 35. They comprise approximately 50% of the congregation and are considered middle-class workers. Their occupations include elementary school teachers, federal government employees, engineers, state and county government employees, and the military (Hunter is very close to Andrews Air Force Base, Fort George Meade Army Base, Quantico, and Fort Belvoire Marine Bases). Their annual incomes range from $20,000 to

$35,000. In Fig. 7, the per capita income in 1991 dollars shows that the average member of Hunter is within the 22% to 25% range for Prince George's County and for the state of Maryland. Very few would be considered upper-middle class with an annual salary range from $45,000 to $55,000 (these individuals hold the high level government jobs, both federal and state, with some owning their own businesses), while there maybe one or two upper-class who make in excess of $60,000 annually. The remaining 10% are the retired members, fixed income, unemployed, and the disabled. According to Fig. 7, the 1993 county population was 752,828, a 12% increase over 1982 with a 31% employment rate. This middle and upper-class lifestyle has caused a laisez-faire attitude towards public safety and personal crises of violence. In Fig. 1, it is clear that the quality of life is declining for the residents of Prince George's County because of its geographic location between the Washington Metropolitan Area and Baltimore, Maryland who rank among the worse crime cities in America with a population of 250,000 or more (see the map in Fig. 14). For these cities, the violent crime rate (i.e., murders, rapes, and robberies) have increased from 597 in 1980 to 758 in 1992.

Fig. 13, is the result of a recent poll based on a Washington Post telephone survey of 1,002 randomly selected Prince George's County residents conducted July 15-20, 1994 concerning the quality of life was divided along racial lines as to the conditions in their community. The sample showed

that of the 482 blacks, 406 whites and 112 who were of other races or declined to answer the question there is a distinct difference in the way these two groups picture the conditions in their communities. While 178 blacks said that the quality of life stayed the same over the past decade, 215 whites said that the quality of life was worse. It is interesting to note that in the last ten years Prince George's County increased its population by 12%. Most of this change is due to African Americans moving into this affluent county. The whites, however, see this as detrimental to the growth of the county and remain steadfast in relinquishing real political and economic power to minorities. The net result is hostility and resentment between the two groups which produces a violation of personhood referred to in chapter one. Whites feel that their lives are in danger, so they purchase a handgun for protection. Hopeless blacks feel swindled by the social programs that once supported them through their unemployment days and they participate in a life of crime with a gun. Police brutality and the use of the handgun is just one aspect of this violation of personhood that persists in Prince George's County.

In recent weeks, the communities of Prince George's County have experienced a rash in handgun violence including drive-by shootings. The county corresponds to the national trend in handgun violence. In Fig. 2, Time reports that 67 million private citizens own a handgun (Washington Post in

Fig. 12 states that 50% of households in America have one or more guns), while 640,000 violent crimes were committed annually from 1979 - 1987 with the use of handguns. The point that is being made is that there are more handguns in the home than on the streets. One can assume that violence in the home is more of a problem. This assumption is substantiated by recent reports by the FBI Uniform Crime and the Bureau of Justice Statistics in Fig. 12, as reported in the Washington Post, October, 1993. The data shows that of the 23,440 suicides in America 18,885 were from firearms, in contrast, to the 22,900 homicides only 16,218 deaths were from firearms. Clearly from Fig. 12, whites are three times more likely to die from suicide than blacks, while blacks are ten times more likely to die from a homicide than whites. In other words, blacks are not killing whites so much as they are killing each other. The consequence of this outward display of violence and crime is the constant threat of becoming a victim. This worrying is another form of mental violence that plagues many communities. In Fig. 3, questions were asked of 500 Americans concerning violence, and 57% of suburban Americans worry about becoming a victim of crime. Since Prince George's County is considered suburban, that would mean 429,112 residents of Prince George's think about becoming a victim daily.

The members of Hunter Memorial are kept continually appraised of the ministries on a monthly basis by publishing a calendar and a quarterly newsletter. Ten years ago, this

range in family income and age distribution would be unheard of in the Suitland Community.

It is interesting to note that the church sees itself (i.e., understands and perceive's its history) in terms of the personality of the pastor in charge. When you read the history of Hunter both past and present, noticeable characteristics begin to surface, such as, the affection for the pastor, his gift to preach, and administer. The Reverend George A. Manning, pastored Hunter longer than any other minister (Hunter has never had a female pastor) and remnants of his personality are still a part of Hunter's approach and style in doing ministry even though Reverend Manning is now the Presiding Elder of the Potomac District.

Since the birth of Hunter in 1897, its focus has been mainly Christian education either by way of Sunday School or Bible study. Today, there are three Bible studies during the week (one bible study for new converts who have no knowledge of the Bible; another for those new members who feel they need to study beyond salvation; and a newly formed men's Bible study). As I see it, a significant challenge for Hunter Memorial A.M.E. Church in the present and future is: (1) providing violence and substance abuse intervention in Prince George's community by organizing the religious community, and (2) developing a crisis support group for the Suitland community of Prince George's County.

A Brief Spiritual Autobiography and What I Bring To This Project

It is important to understand, at the outset of this spiritual autobiography, that the reader be aware of the fact that I had no intention of being a preacher, minister, evangelist or any type of professional associated with the church. I was perfectly satisfied with being a systems engineer for General Electric located at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA in Greenbelt, Maryland). This was the career and profession for which I had studied, trained, and worked so hard for over the last seventeen years prior to my being called by God to the Christian ministry.

With an extensive background in mathematics and other sciences, I paid little or no attention to the lifestyle of my parents and/or grandparents who would take my sisters and me to worship God all day on Sundays. Some of my mother's relatives were members of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Baltimore, Maryland, and as a child, I attended Sunday School there because my aunt, Julia McLain, was the Sunday School Superintendent. Occasionally, my aunt would stay for morning worship and listen to the pastor, the late Reverend Harrison J. Bryant, and in the afternoon, my grandmother would take me to her church, the House of Prayer, for a worship service with the late "Daddy Grace" at the House of Prayer.

Little did I know that the relationships I formed at this

time in my life, would be extremely important later. It was of no consequence to me then that my close companions at Bethel A.M.E. Church, Harrison J. Bryant, Jr., John R. Bryant, and Eleanor Bryant were also in the Sunday school class at this time. Later, however, two of these individuals would play an important part in my spiritual journey.

By the time that I was ten years of age, my mother and father had divorced and remarried. We moved to a different area of Baltimore and distance prevented us from attending Bethel A.M.E. Church. Then, because of proximity, the family joined Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church, Baltimore, Maryland under the leadership of the late Reverend Hiram Smith. Reverend Smith baptized me, my stepfather, my mother, and my oldest sister. I never understood why we were never baptized in the Methodist Church, but much of my Christian Education was nurtured in Baptist Churches.

I left Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church when I started Baltimore Polytechnic Institute (a college preparatory public high school) because a close friend and school mate, Amassa Fauntleroy, was a member of Sharon Baptist Church where the late Reverend Dr. James Moore was the pastor. Amassa and I sang in the Eliot Youth Church Choir together.

When Amassa and I graduated from high school, our college-lives began and he attended Johns Hopkins University and I matriculated at Howard University. It seems that our church-lives began to decline, in fact, I can not remember

with any clarity or certainty ever attending a church consistently during this period of my life. My freshman and sophomore years at Howard University School of Engineering, Washington, D.C., were difficult and unpleasant. There were several attacks on the male dorms by local gangs and the living conditions became increasingly tense. During this period the nation also changed for ever after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

I transferred to Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland, where I majored in Mathematics and Philosophy under the tutelage of the late Dr. I.W. Taylor and Dr. Lucius Outlaw, who were both ordained clergy. While studying at Morgan, I accepted a job at Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Defense Systems Division, Baltimore, as an Electronics Technician. This position kept me from the United States Army draft to fight in Vietnam. Several high school and college classmates were casualties of war. This was an enormous adjustment for me.

For the next seventeen years, I avoided any kind of involvement with the church. In fact, the last idea that could possibly be on my mind was the church. My career was now moving along successfully as a Space Systems Engineer for General Electric at the National Aeronautical and Space Administration. I was married and living in the shadow of Capitol Hill; my children were teenagers and I was being considered for a promotion as Branch Manager of the Ground

Tracking and Data Handling Department at NASA-GE. It was during this time in my life that a series of events occurred that changed the course of my life for ever.

First, my father, who was never a significant person in my development, began to have a series of heart attacks which eventually forced him to retire at an early age. The cardiologist strongly advised him to rest and enjoy the rest of his life in leisure. However, my father did not follow the advice of the doctors. As a result, he started a small home improvement business that kept him very active. Consequently, he had other heart attacks that caused him to be hospitalized.

I was his eldest son, and naturally it was my responsibility to be at his side with four of my six sisters who were taking it pretty hard. It was during his illness and recuperation that we developed the relationship that a father and son should have. Sometimes we would talk for hours about things of interest to each other only to find out that some of our interests were similar. He felt comfortable talking to me about his near death experiences. The paramedics had revived him by electric shock several times. He talked about being in a coma and coming back to reality. I became intrigued by this phenomenon and read Kubler Ross' Death and Dying, and this book helped me immensely with the crisis of death and dying.

I felt good about the bond that was developing between us and shared with him that my marriage was in trouble and things seemed to be crumbling around me. The discussion went well

and I left the hospital feeling comfortable for the first time in months.

A few days later I received a call from my aunt who said that my father had another heart attack while in the hospital. When I arrived at Baltimore's Provident Hospital to see my father an unexplained heaviness was all around me. The nurses had recently removed him from intensive care to progressive care. By the time I arrived, he was resting in a single room and greeted me as I entered. He began to talk more philosophically than ever before about the meaning and the purpose of life. Then, without warning or pause, he turned to me and asked, "What do you intend to do with the rest of your life?" Before I could respond with any clarity, the heart monitors attached to my father began to sound, his breathing became very irregular, and then he blacked out. I called for the nurse who sounded a code blue, and this caused nurses and doctors to come from every where to attend to his failing heart. They began CPR and pushed his bed down the hallway back to intensive care. This was the last time that my father gained consciousness.

As I waited on word of my father's condition, the question he asked me continued to ring in my mind, "What are you going to do with the rest of your life?" The doctor finally came with the tragic news that my father had lapsed into a coma. Ten days later, the family buried him in Baltimore.

I felt betrayed, duped, swindled by God. All my life I wanted to know my real father, to be in conversation with him, to know his friends, to talk about his boyhood, to speak the things that a son would speak to a father. Nothing seemed to matter any more as I began to drink and gamble heavily. The gambling eventually exhausted my finances and my car was repossessed; my mortgage payments were three months past due; and finally, my wife filed for divorce. All of this, plus my father's sudden death was just too much for me to bear.

I was searching for meaning in my life and began to read the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. When I finished, I began all over again. It gave me no answers to what I was experiencing. It was during this crisis that the call to preach began through dreams, visions and headaches.

The dreams, visions and headaches persisted over a period of six to eight weeks with no relief. In the dream, I would be on a plane which developed engine failure. The plane crashed killing every passenger except me. As I tried to free myself from the burning rubble, Christ appeared to me with His arms stretched wide compelling me to come with Him for safety. The dream would always end at this point because I would awaken from my sleep only to be confronted by the headaches.

There was no rational explanation for what was happening to me. As a scientist, I needed reason to prevail. I had a complete physical by my physician and a neurologist. The neurologist's diagnosis found no physical evidence or

explanation for what I was experiencing. In other words, there were no scientific reasons for what was occurring in my life. The neurologist recommended that I see a psychiatrist. The very thought of a psychiatric evaluation brought a pall to my disposition.

My mother, who seemed to have a sixth sense about me, called and asked how I was doing since the death of my father. Normally I would say that everything was fine, but in desperation I began to share everything with her. I remember distinctly that she began to weep and thank God for answering her prayers. She shared some amazing information of how I once had a brother who died a few months after birth. Before his death, my mother prayed that the Lord would call one of us to preach. She always thought that it would be my brother, Sheldon, but the Lord called him to glory. Hearing my story rekindled that early prayer of dedication to the Lord.

I could not accept this notion of being called to preach; it was not sensible; my life was a mess and after all I had not been in a church in fifteen to seventeen years. Why would God want me?

My mother suggested that I talk with a minister about my experiences. She highly recommended the Reverend John Richard Bryant (the same John Bryant of my childhood Sunday school class), the new pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Baltimore, where she currently worshipped.

I resisted for a while, but the headaches, the dreams and

visions propelled me into a counseling session with Reverend John R. Bryant in May, 1976. It was difficult to imagine this was the same John Bryant that I once ran around the church with as a child, and played games in the catacombs beneath the sanctuary. John was now the pastor; it all seemed so strange to me.

I thought that he would laugh when I shared my story, but he listened patiently until I finished. When I finished, he shared with me his call story and assured me that I was not going out of my mind, but that he thought that I was called to preach. Reverend Bryant recommended that the next time the dreams occurred that I should respond to the Lord's call by surrendering and saying "yes" to His will; only then would I have peace.

That night I slept better than I had in months. Finally, it was over, no more headaches, no more dreams and visions. For forty-eight hours there was peace in my soul. I rejoiced because I was not convinced that preaching was for me. On the third morning after the session with Dr. Bryant, I woke in a cold sweat confronting the same dream as before. Shaking and terrified I remembered the words of Reverend Bryant, "Say Yes to the Lord!" If it meant that the dreams and visions would stop, I was willing to try anything. With all that I could summons I cried out, "Yes to you Lord!" I remember distinctly the peace that came over me at that moment; it is still hard to articulate with any clarity and not lose the depth of the

experience.

I called Reverend Bryant and his wife Cecelia immediately to inform them of what had taken place. They listened carefully over the phone as I shared my experience. When I finished they had prayer with me and set up another appointment to discuss my career and future in the church. Why did I need to discuss my career and future? Who was changing my plans? These and other questions began to weigh heavily on my mind.

Needless to say, I purposely avoided the next session with the Bryants because I thought that the ministry was too much a commitment and career alteration. It was much more than I was willing to sacrifice at this time. Furthermore, my life-style, as I perceived it, was not the kind of life-style that was becoming a minister of the Gospel.

I would attend Bethel, but I would sit in the balcony and leave before my parents knew I was there. I continued to run from the call and avoid Reverend Bryant. In 1976, the Friday before Pentecost Sunday, Bethel was having an all night prayer and anointing service. I attended the service and sat as far back in the lower auditorium as I could without being in the narthex. People were participating with testimonies and prayers, occasionally the choir would lift a hymn. I refused to participate, but something would not let me leave. Pastor Bryant announced that there was time for one more testimony before coming to the altar for the prayer of anointing.

Without conscious notion of what I was doing, I found myself standing before all those people giving my story. When I finished, Pastor Bryant told the congregation that God was calling me to preach and if I yielded to the call I would be the first under his ministry at Bethel.

Pastor Bryant then instructed the congregation to come to the altar for the prayer of anointing. As I stood in line, shaken by the entire event, and waiting to kneel at the altar, I prayed to God that if I was really called to preach please give me a sign so there would be no doubt for my scientific mind. I kept rehearsing this over and over in my mind as if by rote memory, but there was no word from the Lord. Pastor Bryant anointed each person with oil as they knelt at the altar, and then my turn came to kneel at the altar. I could feel the presence of Cecelia Bryant from behind and hear her voice as I prayed at the altar for a sign from the Lord.

As Pastor Bryant approached me with the oil, I was enveloped in a bright, white light that sent me to the floor. I laid there blinded by the light and unable to move or speak. I tried calling for help, but no words would come forth, I had no control over my physical being. "Why doesn't someone call 911", I remember thinking. Momentarily, I thought I was dead, but I could hear Cecelia's voice telling me to call on the name of Jesus. As I began to submit and call on the name of Jesus, my faculties began to return to my control. As I opened my tear filled eyes, I could see Reverend Bryant,

Cecelia and other officers peering down on me in wonder. There was no doubt now. The Lord had indeed called me, and from this point on, my life would never be the same.

I preached my trial sermon on Sunday afternoon, April 3, 1977 at Union Baptist Church across the street from Bethel A.M.E. because there were candidates for baptism by immersion. Bethel, at this point, did not have a baptismal pool, but Reverend Vernon Dobson was kind enough to allow Bethel to use its facilities. My family, a few co-workers from GE-NASA where I was employed, retired Bishop Harrison J. Bryant and his wife, Mother Edith Bryant were in attendance (both are now deceased). My sermon subject was "God Has Not Called Me to Baptize, But To Preach The Gospel" from I Corinthians 1:17. When I finished delivering the message, one of my younger sisters, Laurie, gave her life to Christ and joined the church.

From that moment on, I absorbed myself in the ministry to learn as much as possible. To accomplish this task, I stayed close to Pastor Bryant because I had been away from church-life for a very long time. Reverend Bryant eventually appointed me as a class leader. In addition to this assignment, he placed me in another position as Minister to New Members. This ministry grew to a class of two hundred people each Sunday morning. It was tantamount to being a pastor as I listened to the pain, suffering, and sometime tragic family events, but I learned to cope. My ministry and

association with Pastor Bryant allowed me to meet successful pastors both within and without the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1979, I left Bethel to begin my theological/seminary education by matriculating to Boston University School of Theology. I chose this seminary for four reasons: (1) this was the seminary from which my pastor, the Reverend John R. Bryant graduated; (2) this seminary had a history of graduating many of the leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; (3) this was the institution where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a distinguished alumnus; (4) this seminary offered a full tuition scholarship.

While in Boston, I worshipped at St. Paul A.M.E. Church, Cambridge, MA under the leadership of the Reverend Dr. Leroy Attles. I met several people who later proved to be invaluable spiritual friends. While at Boston University, I worked as a campus minister and was elected as the President of the Black Seminarian Students. The high point of this position was bringing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s widow, Coretta Scott King, to Marsh Chapel to commemorate his birthday. However, this high point of my seminary career, was not without several obstacles, one of which was the President of Boston University, Dr. Silber. But despite these difficulties, I was able to complete the task.

After this encounter with the University President, I no longer felt comfortable at Boston University, so I left during

the summer, 1981 for Baltimore, Maryland to start a church. After conversations with Bishop John Hurst Adams and Reverend John Bryant, I launched out with one hundred members and the blessings from Bethel to start Adams Chapel A.M.E. in March, 1982. Within three years the church had grown to four hundred members, and seven people were called into the ministry.

In 1985, Bishop Adams assigned me to historic St. James A.M.E. Church in Havre de Grace, Maryland. Four people were called into the ministry during my pastorate in Havre de Grace. The budget of the church doubled and a building program was instituted. It was at St. James that I had an opportunity to continue my seminary studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey which was less than a two hours drive away.

In 1988, Bishop John Hurst Adams assigned me to my present appointment, Hunter Memorial A.M.E. Church in Suitland, Maryland. Since coming to Hunter the membership has more than doubled, from four hundred to nine hundred-fifty. Twenty-two persons have been called to the ministry. An outreach ministry was started to serve the immediate community.

I finished Princeton Theological Seminary in May, 1989 by commuting on the Amtrak train each week. Some members of Hunter drove to New Jersey to attended the commencement exercise. After graduation, I became very active in the county by serving on several boards, such as, the Prince

George's County Commission for the Family, Prince George's County Church Development Review Task Force, and a founding member of the Inter-Faith Action Communities which initiated a major housing cooperative called CHOICE (Creative Housing Opportunities Everywhere) in Prince George's County. I served as a member of the Steering Committee for the Regional Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) for Prince George's County, Maryland. I applied for a conference grant from the Office of Substance Abuse and Prevention (OSAP) for the church because of the high during infestation surrounding the community and the church. Hunter was the number one recipient and will host the conference in November, 1992 at the University of Maryland, College Park. During this period of activity, I saw and experienced incidents of social injustice in Prince George's county that changed the way I preached forever. Incidents such as police brutality, race and sexual discrimination, black-on-black crime and violence.

The spiritual autobiography that I had to write for this project has caused me to reflect carefully on the spiritual path that I have taken whether by choice or divine guidance. Also, it has caused me to raise some questions at this particular time for the Doctor of Ministry project that I must complete. For instance, what is the effect, if any, between the homilectical moment and the intervention into the crisis of violence in Prince George's County? Is there a correlation between preaching and the spiritual health of a congregation?

How much pain, suffering, and humiliation must people go through before the preaching and preacher change to intervene in the lives of those who suffer? These questions are a concern for me, and it is here that I want to concentrate for my Doctor of Ministry project.

CHAPTER 6

THE PROJECT: PREACHING TO THE CRISIS OF VIOLENCE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

The Replicable Model: Is There A Word From The Lord?

The model-in-ministry for this project was to develop and implement an intervention healing community ministry. The plan of this ministry is to restore the hope and spiritual development for the victims of violent acts that were perpetrated by overt or covert means. The project will include interviews, a series of seven sermons, a time of reflection by the participants of their personal journeys as victims and their way to recovery, and questionnaires for evaluation. Each participant will be instructed on ways to overcome personal and communal victimization.

Stage 1: Interview

Seven families of the congregation and the community at-large were interviewed as to the conditions of their particular victimization. These families were chosen because of their known crises and their extensive pastoral counseling sessions. The congregation was asked to participate to see if there might be similarities in their responses.

Stage 2. Questionnaire

Each person interviewed was asked to fill out a

questionnaire before s/he listened to the sermons. A similar approach was carried out for the congregation.

Stage 3. Sermon Preparation

The information from the interviews and the questionnaires were used to prepare and develop a series of seven sermons from the theme, Victims of Violence: Is There a Word From The Lord?

Stage 4. Evaluation

This stage will run concurrently with stage 3 in that an evaluation of the sermon will be done by questionnaire. The context associates, victims of violence, and members at-large from the congregation who are present will give a personal assessment as to the effectiveness of each sermon.

Stage 5. The Final Product

The final result of this project was two fold:

a. To determine the effectiveness of sermon intervention into the lives of the victimized from stages 1 through 4, positive or negative.

b. From the data obtained in (a), produce a guide or handbook for victims of violence as a source of intervention, hope, and healing on a continuous basis. This handbook is not a part of this document, but it is to be a postdoctoral project. However, a sample page of the handbook is included.

APPENDIX 1: THE SERMONS

Finding Good in the Midst of Evil

"But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." Genesis 50:20 KJV

There has been much attention given to violence and evil over the last several months. The headlines of our newspaper, the news reports, including the last two issues of Time, U.S. News and the World Report. They devoted their front page story to violence and evil in our society, then we wonder why we are afraid to go out after dark or even in the daylight.

We discovered this week that one of our members was attacked at her front door in broad daylight as she entered her home. It seems that some young men attacked her knocking her to the ground. She was robbed, and dragged to the curb. Through it all, God spared her life.

We try to make sense out of all the evil that surrounds us, while some feel that they can move mountains in the midst of evil. When our communities become violent and evil, we feel that we can move away from evil by moving into more affluent neighborhoods. I am hear to say that we cannot escape evil that easily. We need to learn how to find the good that dwells in the midst of evil, because we cannot

escape it! You are not immune to it no matter how much money you make, how much education you have or what contacts you are leaning to for protection. There is no escape from evil.

We ask ourselves sometimes: "How do you cope with evil? How can one find good in the midst evil, pain and suffering? After all, good and evil do not mix, furthermore do they relate to one another." But I want to share with you the fact that we are so inundated, we are so overwhelmed with evil that we overlook the good that is right there in front of us. In fact, the media is so anxious to report evil they have no time for the good. Ask the media to come out on a Friday afternoon when:

(1) a few young people are getting together for a mentoring program;

(2) the young ladies are not having babies;

(3) the young men are not packing guns, and they are not mugging any one.

These are the exceptions to the rule that have not been plaguing our society. While arrests of youths under 18 have jumped 92% since 1985, these are the exception to the rule. While arrests for violent crimes by youths under 18, mostly boys, jumped from 54,000 in 1970 to 104,000 in 1992, these are the exception to the rule. While the Washington area ranked highest in teenage violent deaths, highest in poverty, highest for infant mortality, and highest for incarceration, these are the exception to the rule. Yet, you will not find one reporter with a camera, one radio announcer with a good

report, not even someone who might have a vested interest. If there were a few young people robbing a store or mugging the elderly in a shopping center, the police would be everywhere, cameras would be on the scene flashing their lamps because we have learn to responded to the negative. We have been programmed to find evil without looking for good to the point that we do not expect to find good at all.

We must learn how to turn that situation around. We do that by finding good in the midst of evil. If you do not know how to do that, you must first change your way of seeing things. You must change what you read, what you hear, who you associate with. All of these things have a factor in our life. A reprogramming or redirecting what we associate with must take place. Look at the text where Joseph is saying to his brothers,

> "You meant evil for me, you meant harm to me, but all the time while you where trying to do evil for me, God was working in the midst of that and turned it around for good."

Many of us feel that what we are going through is a result of what our fathers or our mothers did. We think we that we are living under a curse. We may not understand the full scope of what is happening in our lives because we do not fully understand our relationship in God.

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and Rachel. Because he was one of the sons of Jacob in his old age, Jacob loved him and he treated him like he was more to him than his ten

older brothers. One day Jacob made a multi-colored robe for his young son and Joseph began to parade around his 10 older brothers and said, "look what Daddy made for me. I have a multi-colored robe and you only have a two-colored robe or a single colored robe. God just blessed me through Daddy and Daddy loves me". You have got to be careful about how you share your blessings. You never know whether you might be making an enemy out of a close friend or brother. The scripture says that because of what Joseph did, his ten older brothers hated him and plotted to him in. Scripture says they were out in Dothan attending to their fathers sheep one day when his father (Jacob) sent Joseph out there to visit his brothers. While he was on his way they said, "here comes that dreamer brother of ours, we must do something about him. Every time we try to tell our Daddy how we have blessed him and how we have done all of this work, here comes Joseph dancing around Daddy with that multi-colored robe and I get so sick and tired of him. You must be careful as blessed children of God when you are around people who do not understand the working of God, they will plot against you, they will scheme to get your job. As Joseph came out there in the midst of his brothers, they grabbed him and snatched him and threw him to the ground and began to punch and beat on him and took the robe that his father had given him and now they said, now that we have gone this far, what shall we do. Then it was Judas that declared that what they should do is through

him down in a ditch and then we will go back and tell our father that Joseph was killed and we will take his robe and dip it in goat's blood and make it look like a wild animal has ripped him to shreds and we will leave him out here and go back and tell our Daddy. Then Judas said, that may not be good enough because he might get out of that ditch and tell Daddy, then we will really be in a world of trouble. After all, this is his favorite son. That is why my brothers and sisters that evil is always trying to keep it's heavy foot on your neck. If they ever got their foot off your neck you know who you are going to tell, you will tell God all about it and God will do something about it. So they planned and planned until they got this wild scheme that they would sell Joseph to a band of Midianites who were on their way to Egypt. They said, that is what we will do, we will sell Joseph into slavery and we will take the multi-colored robe back to our father. That is what they did.

The Midianites sold Joseph to one of Pharaoh's officers called Pontifi. While they were doing that, the ten older brothers went back to Jacob and said,

> "Jacob we have some bad news! Joseph was killed by a wild animal and we could not save him and here is the robe and his blood."

Jacob was sorrowful because the son that was born in his old age was now destroyed, so he thought. Now he mourned several days because of this evil thing. All the time while the brothers plotted to do evil, God was working it out. I do not

know what you have gone through. Perhaps your marriage went on the rocks ten years ago and financially you have not been able to get your act together. You do not know what God is doing behind the scenes. You may be passed over and over for promotions and you keep asking God, "Why me?" No answer seems to come and you want to get up and quit. Look what God does with Joseph, while he was in Pontifi's house he discovered that Pontifi was one of the chief captains of Pharaoh's house. Pontifi selected Joseph up as one of his highest servants because Joseph had a means of organization and intelligence. Joseph began to run Pontifi's house so efficiently that Pontifi did not come home everyday.

In the midst of all of this, Pontifi's wife recognized Joseph. She recognized that he was different and handsome. All the time while Joseph was going about his business, she was plotting, and scheming. When Pontifi was not at home, she tried to grab Joseph and tried to seduce him, but Joseph was a man of conviction and he ran from the house. She grabbed his clothes and ripped them off as he ran into the street. Pontifi's wife started screaming and the servants came running to her defense as she began to incriminated Joseph.

They grabbed Joseph and held him until Pontifi came home. Pontifi was so upset he threw Joseph in prison. This is the nature of evil. Evil will try to take advantage of you and then destroy your integrity. Evil will arrest you, bind you, confine you, and forget all about you. Evil will try to

destroy your sense of moral character, but you must be strong and take a stand. While Joseph was in prison, God was there with him. That lets me know God is with us no matter what the circumstances. She meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

The record states that while Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh's baker was also in the cell with him. The record does not state the reason for the royal baker's imprisonment, but we find him in jail. Joseph said, "When you get out of this prison, remember me." The relationship between the two began to grow and because Joseph could interpret dreams the royal baker had Joseph interpreted one for him. In turn Joseph asked the baker to remember him whenever he was released. God was working it out even in prison.

Word reached Pharaoh that Joseph could interpret dreams like no one else. Joseph said,

> "Before I give you the solution to your dream, I want you to know that it is God who interprets the dreams."

While some can manage to resist evil's devious strategies, others somehow manage to fall hopelessly trapped in evil's snares of frustration, fear, and faithlessness. Joseph was able to avoid this syndrome by remaining focused on God. When evil placed him in prison, he remained focused. When the royal baker failed to keep his promise, Joseph remained focused. That is the word for us today. Remain focus when evil delays you plans. Remain focus when evil grips your

freedom of mobility.

Pharaoh asked Joseph the meaning of the dream, and he said it means that you are going to have seven years of plenty and what you need to do is to take those seven years of plenty, build some storehouses and store all of the grain and everything that your land reproduces because after seven years, you are going to have seven years of famine.

Pharaoh believed Joseph and made him second in command over all of Egypt. Here is a man who was knocked down by evil, thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold into slavery never to be seen again, yet in the midst of evil he comes to Egypt, accused of attempted rape and thrown into prison again; but God all the time was working behind the scenes. Joseph never complained and God lifted him up to be second in command only to Pharaoh.

God blessed Egypt so much that they did not have enough warehouses to store all that God had blessed them with. That says to me when people mean evil for you, God will turn it around matching blessings against curses. Your blessings will outnumber your curses.

The dream said that after the seven years of plenty the famine would come. People from all over that region came to Egypt, because they new that Egypt had food even though there was famine in the land. Joseph looked up one day and here comes his ten older brothers. The same ones who plotted against him; the same ones who threw him in a ditch; the same

ones who took his robe from him and washed it in blood so that it looked as if he was dead. These were the ones who had plotted evil, but God made it into something good.

If God gives you a vision, it will come to pass. But you may have to wait on it. Twenty-one years later, after humiliation, denial, false promises, and prison, Joseph was second to Pharaoh. Some of us rely on instant blessings for our salvation, but Joseph waited on God.

Twenty-one years later here comes his brothers. When Joseph saw them, he held his peace. Just like the dream said they bow before him. They did not know that it was their brother. They came there because they had a need. There need was so great they could not see their brother. When people are hungry and jobless and homeless evil will not let them see beyond their need. These brothers were blinded by their hunger, but Joseph gave them food to take back.

Joseph discovered that his father had sent them and he now had a younger brother named Benjamin. Joseph promised that he would filled bags to overflow if they brought their younger brother Benjamin with them on their next trip. The brothers were ashamed, however, when they found sacks of money on their caravan, and believed they had not paid for the food. They had no idea that this was their brother Joseph's doing.

Ashamed of this incident, they told their father they had to go back to repay this generous fellow. Returning they were welcomed by Joseph again. Here Joseph had an opportunity to

return evil for evil, yet he showed restraint.

Scripture says that Joseph's tears were overwhelming when they began to talk about the fact that their father was so sick that he was dying, Joseph got up off of his throne and he ran to his chamber. He wept to the point that all of the servants could hear him weeping. God will bless you so much that it will make your cry sometimes. Not that you are sad but you cry because your cup is running over.

I can imagine that Joseph could not hold it any longer as he thought they tried to throw me in a deep dark pit; they tried to kill me; my father is about to die but all along, God was turning this evil plot into something good. Joseph came out and told his brothers who he was.

He embraced his brothers and began to rejoice. The servants came in wondering what was going on and they could see that Joseph was happy. No revenge, but joy. No bitterness, but joy. No hatred, but joy.

If you want to know how to find good in the midst of evil do not try to be a partner with hatred, be like Joseph. Whenever he had an opportunity to do good he did good. He did not have to lie on Pontifi's wife, he didn't have to tell what she had done because He knew that God's truth will straighten out evil.

Second, you need to learn how to forgive all people even your family. Someone once said you always hurt the one you love. Forgiveness is not just for your family, but learn how

to forgive your enemies, as well. In all of this Joseph knew how to forgive. He forgave Pontifi's wife; he forgave the royal baker who would not tell Pharaoh the truth; he forgave his brothers. God said because you forgave them, I will forgive you.

Finally, Joseph learned how to find good in the midst of evil by being patient. Sometimes God will take those who did evil against you and stand them in front of your face and make them confess and make them ask for your forgiveness. I am so glad about it because I may not have enough money material things but God looks at my heart and see that my heart is right. Go out and celebrate just like Joseph's brothers.

Beautiful Gates and Broken People

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer---at three in the afternoon. Now a man cripple from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!' So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do 'not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." Acts 3:1-10 NIV

It was a clear, uneventful day. There was nothing special about the gathering of people in the market place, except, that it was about three in the afternoon, and time for evening prayer. The trumpet sounded signaling the call to worship and prayer. A vast sea of people began to hurriedly make their way routinely through the market place, up the hill through the Gate called Beautiful leading into the temple. In all their hurry no one noticed a poor, prostrate paralytic who was being carried to the temple no to pray, but to beg. He was placed in his usual position on Solomon's portico. It was an outer chamber that surrounded the temple, a place where the sick and the beggars gathered daily to make a living begging from the sea of people who entered to pray.

Meanwhile, weaving and winding through the crowd we find Peter and John, two itinerant preachers making their daily

pilgrimage to afternoon prayer service. They were perhaps engrossed in conversation concerning a recent sermon preached by Peter in which 3,000 were added to their following. As Peter and John neared the entrance of the temple, they began to admire the Gate called Beautiful as it glistened in the afternoon sunlight. Suddenly, a voice pierced through their conversation, "Alms! Alms!"

Turning unexpectantly, Peter and John looked straight at this bent and broken beggar. As we looked at this man in his brokenness, symbolically he represents the many homeless people who sleep on steam grates in the dead of winter to keep warm; or, the battered wife who is afraid to speak up against her disturbed husband. The AIDS victim who is left untouched for fear of contracting the disease. The mentally ill who walk the streets because the hospitals have no room for their condition; or, the unwanted infant who is wrapped in newspaper by a drug addicted parent and left in an abandoned building. As we see him for the first time, the beauty of the gate seems irrelevant. Being on time for prayer meeting is unimportant for the moment.

At that instant, Peter and John somehow knew instinctively that this man's condition was a poor image of Christ's kingdom. Their concern is still an issue today for we are still bound by our materialism. As they continued to focus on this man, they could hear the voice of Christ resonating through a poem entitled "Listen Christians" that

was circulated at a poor people's rally in Albuquerque, New Mexico:

> I was hungry
> and you formed a humanitarian club
> and you discussed my hunger
> Thank you.
>
> I was imprisoned
> and you crept off quietly
> to your chapel in the cellar
> and prayed for my release.
>
> I was naked
> and in your mind
> you debated the morality of my appearance.
>
> I was sick
> and you knelt and thanked God for your health.
>
> I was homeless
> and you preached to me
> of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.
>
> I was lonely
> and you left me alone
> to pray for me.
> You seem so holy;
> so close to God.
> But I'm still very hungry
> and lonely
> and cold.
>
> So where have your prayers gone?
> What have they done?
> What does it profit a (person)
> to page through their book of prayers
> when the rest of the world
> is crying for their help?

This poem captures what was going on in my mind as I looked at this man through the eyes of the apostles. Peter and John realized that they needed to re-define their mission for the moment. Their mission now was not as prayers but as priests, not merely as church attenders but as Christians, not solely as saints in worship but servants in service for the sake of

Christ.

They commanded the paralytic: "Look at us!" Not in our humanity, but in our humility! "Look at us!" Not in our poverty of gifts, but in our possibility to deliver. Look at us and look away from the distorted images of the Church. Look away from the scandal of PTL, Oral Roberts, and Jimmy Swaggart. Look away from the grandiose structure of worship and the plea for more money to make them larger. Look on us and see the scandal of the cross on calvary. Look on us and see the grandeur of Christ's grace.

The beggar gave the apostles his attention, expecting to receive something from them. If you want to transform your brokenness, you must be willing to wait expectantly, even when it hurts. Peter said,

> "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk."

The command to walk was not a frivolous statement given to get rid of this person, but the command was given with all the power and the authority as on the day of pentecost. The command to walk was not an esoteric statement made in jest; the command given by Peter was a command of solidarity. Peter took the man by the right hand, helping him to his feet.

Church and society can learn a valuable lesson here. Giving people resources without being in solidarity with their suffering can be as damaging as the affliction they causes them to suffer. Handouts, favors, government assistance can do irreparable damage to their self-esteem, self-worth, and

self-determination. Nevertheless, Peter reached down and participated in the broken man's attempt to gain status in humanity. Peter participated in this man's struggle for human existence, and immediately, instantaneously the paralytic's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped up and ran into the temple praising God for his transformation from brokenness. All the people in the temple recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging. Hallelujah!!

Praying For A Breakthrough

"Then he said unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words." Daniel 10:12 (KJV)

Many conditions in our society today have caused some of us to pray for a breakthrough. Some may feel insulated from the crime, chaos, and confusion that plaque certain neighborhoods, but the day will come when distance will not be a barrier, deterrent, or hinderance to the crises that we face in our times. A crises that produces in the Washington Metropolitan area the highest level of deaths, infant mortalities, incarcerations, among teenagers in the nation. When you become sensitized to the problems that your people face, it moves you to earnestly pray for a breakthrough.

Moses prayed that the bitter waters of the desert would become sweet. Ex.15:24,25.

Gideon prayed that God would give him a sign. Ju.6:39.

Hannah prayed and God heard her plea to bare a child. I Sam. 1:27.

Solomon prayed and Jehovah blessed the temple. II Chr.7:16.

Elijah prayed on Mt. Carmel and fire fell from heaven. I Kings 18:37,38.

Hezekiah prayed at the point of death and God added 15 more years to his life. II Kings 20:4-6.

Daniel realized like many of us that:

1. The more people are blessed the less time they have for prayer.

2. The more people are blessed the more arrogant and disrespectful they are towards the things of God.

3. The more people are distracted by other solutions to their problems the less significance prayer plays in their life.

Thus, Daniel was sensitized to the needs of his people and set out to pray until an answer from God was sent. Daniel was concerned about the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem two years earlier with hopes of rebuilding the temple. Two years had past and no word was heard of their progress. According to the third and fourth chapters of Ezra, they had encountered great difficulty. Jerusalem laid desolate and they were only capable of restoring the altar while the foundation of the temple remained in ruin.

Somehow, this distressing news of their failure reached Daniel. Since Daniel was a praying man, it was only natural that he gather a few trusted friends to travel with him to fast and pray. John Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary suggests that the time was March 14th, 536 B.C., when Cyrus was king of Persia during the season of Passover and of Unleaven Bread. Yet, Daniel declares that he ate no pleasant bread, no wine, and no flesh of any kind. To further his cause and concentration, Daniel did not anoint or refresh himself for three solid weeks while in prayer. Daniel was preparing himself for divine revelation from God, because he understood the essence of prayer. Come here Daniel tell us about prayer.

I hear Daniel saying to us Prayer is:

*continuous communion with God by staying in constant fellowship.

*the knowledge that God has wonders beyond our imagination.

*is a gift of power to be developed and disciplined.

*is sheer ecstasy when fully developed because it ushers us into the presence of God's Holiness.

On the 24th of April by the Hiddikel River (Tigris or Iran) just 35 miles from Babylon, Daniel experienced a vision, a theophany, a divine manifestation of God, if you will, that would transform his life completely. This vision was so powerful that it literally drained what little strength he had, causing Daniel to fall to his knees.

What did he see? Daniel saw a man clothed in linen, his waist was wrapped with a gold belt, his body glistened like beryl (i.e., blue, green, pink), his face was like lightning, his eyes as flaming torches, his arms and feet like polished brass, and his voice like the words of a multitude.

Daniel looked to his friends for help, but the power of the vision caused them to flee and hide from the presence of God. Daniel was alone, weak, and discomforted. It was in this weakened state that God restored his strength and gave him the breakthrough for which he had been looking.

Is it possible for us to obtain a breakthrough as we near the twenty-first century with all the crises we face?

What did Daniel do that ensure him of a breakthrough?

1. SPIRITUAL PREPARATION VV. 2,3

   During the Passover, Daniel sanctified himself.

2. SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION VV. 8,9

   Daniel could spiritually sense the things of God.

3. SPIRITUAL POWER VV. 18

   Daniel received strength in his weakness.

Breakthroughs come when you remain faithful to God.

Breakthroughs come when you submit yourself to God.

Breakthroughs come when you wait on God.

The angel of God informs Daniel from the first day of his prayer, the Lord God had sent an answer however, the Prince of (over) Persia, delayed the delivery that the angel was commissioned to do. But, the angel called for reinforcements, Michael the Archangel fought while Gabriel delivered the message.

Don't Lose Your Song

"By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.
For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, saying,
Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How can we sing the Lord's song
In a foreign land? Psalm 137:1 - 4(NASB)

The Washington Post over the past several weeks has not missed an opportunity to run front page articles on the violence that plagues the Washington Metropolitan area. The surprising thing is that most of the recent violence has been perpetrated by youth and not by adults. More and more as violence increases the youth of our society continue to play an increased role in the violent setting of our society. It is estimated by the Justice Department that youth handgun homicides increased from 143 in 1982 to 299 in 1992 for crimes perpetrated by youth under the age of 14. Drug addiction and use is on the rise, and teen pregnancy is out of control. Consequently, the residents of the Washington Metropolitan area are becoming increasingly hesitant of appearing in public for fear of some violent attack. We feel like captives imprisoned by fear and violence not by bars and chains. It seems as if we are in a strange or foreign land trying to find our real home.

We are living in a generation of hopeless, helpless, and hapless people who feel as if they have nothing to lose. Life for many of them has little or no value, therefore these

violent lawbreakers show reckless abandonment in public. Unfortunately, these individuals have caused the good citizens to lose hope also and our communities have become a strange land. These individuals have essentially lost their song.

The captivity of Israel in Babylon was similar in many ways. First, Israel was asked to perform before their captors as if they had never left their homeland. Second, the instruments Israel used to praise their God would now be used to give praise to their oppressors. Finally, when Israel refused to sing, they realized that they had no choice in the matter.

The difference between then and now is that today we are neither in a strange nor foreign land, but for the most part we have been made to feel like foreigners. Foreigners who have lost their will to survive. Foreigners who have lost their song. Foreigners who have lost their will to overcome the cycle of violence their communities and in their personal lives.

On the other hand, the people of Israel lost their song when they were taken into captivity as slaves to live in Babylon, a strange and foreign land. Israel found herself in captivity not able to escape or overcome the barriers of imprisonment. Not knowing what tomorrow held for them, Israel decided to be placid and passive. Whenever one decides to allow evil to dominate every fiber of one's being, they become subject to the humiliation of the dominant group. Israel

looked up one day and found themselves in captivity, the humiliation of the Babylonians. They had lost their song of determination, persistence, perseverance, tenacity, steadfastness, boldness, conviction, resolve; they had lost their song of song freedom. Subsequently, their future generations were doomed to adopted and adapted to this passive posture of captivity, because there was no one speaking a word of hope.

No longer can we afford, as African Americans, to allow evil to dominant the lives of our children while we pine in social programs that further make us dependant people. Social programs, community organizations, government grants, and educational systems once our friend and savior now they have become the instruments of our destruction working against our survival as a people. IQ tests say that we are inferior; government programs have virtually cut off all funding to assist poor people; health reform is almost dead in the water because no one wants to finance the project; the building of low-income housing has come to a halt because interest rates are to high; African-America mayors have been elected to inner cities only to find high unemployment, crime, poverty, blight, and drug infestation. Yet, we are asked to sing songs of Zion, sing songs of complacency, sing songs of hopelessness, old memories, African-American males endangered species, inferiority, and low self-respect.

The Babylonians knew that if they could convince their

captives to: (1) sing this type of music, the lyrics would be like a self-fulling prophecy, and (2) not sing any songs, it would help produce total bondage and dependency. Singing the songs that the oppressor wants to hear is old stereotype that produces an inferior people. A people who no longer see their oppressors as violent are destine to become violent like their captors. Paulo Freire in his book The Pedagogy of the Oppressed raises this very point, that is, when the oppressed have been in bondage over an extended period of time, they (the oppressed) realize that eliminating the oppressor is virtually impossible, therefore, the oppressed take alternative measures to reduce the pain of suffering and poverty. This alternative measure is what Freire calls "horizontal violence," that is, violence imposed upon fellow sufferers.

The oppressed want to revamp the justice system because of its systems of inequality, to do so requires a great deal of resources, the oppressed then carry out their frustration on their oppressed brothers and sisters. The oppressed want their oppressors to disappear, but realizing that this is not likely to happen the oppressed delude themselves by buying drugs and guns from their oppressors, then sell the drugs and the guns to each other. The delusion that guns and drugs alleviates the sense of powerlessness only spawns more violence, not towards the source but towards innocent bystanders, neighbors, friends, relatives, co-workers, young

children, merchants, and senior citizens.

When Israel refuse to sing, that is, when the captives refuse to buy or sell drug, when they refuse to buy the weapons of their own destruction, Israel discovered that they had no choice in the matter. They also discovered that they were addicted to these weapons. The addiction cause them to become violent for no cause other then to be violent. The addiction cause apathy to reign in their communities. The addiction produced a new generation of addicted users even more deadly than their parents. Finally, the addiction cause them to forget how to sing the songs of Zion.

What should one do when the lyrics of the song are no longer resounding in our spirits? What can we do when asked to sing what we do not want to sing? Is singing still relevant, as a form of deliverance in the 1990's and into the 21st century?

One only has to look at our forefathers and foremothers who were asked to sing a strange song in a strange land of long hours for low pay, in a strange land of humiliation at the expense of their dignity and self respect. The lesson that we can learn is one of survival without compromising integrity, self respect, character, decency, and honor. The assumption here is that one has too much love for one another to engage in acts of self destruction. We have emerge from a community that did not have much of anything, but we had love and respect for each other. There was sharing because we knew

that everyone was struggling and trying to make it together. There was a great deal of love for one another because we knew that no one else cared.

Our parents were able to survive because they kept singing a song,

"The Lord will make a way somehow..."

It did not matter what circumstances were our forefathers and foremothers had spiritual intuition concerning God. They had faith in the Lord's providence no matter what the situation happened to be, they knew that the Lord would make a way somehow. It was this kind of confidence that allowed a Harriet Tubman to help free slaves through the Underground Railroad. This kind of faith and confidence that strengthened Marion Anderson to sing a strange song on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial when insensitive Americans prevent her from singing the same song at the capital. It was this kind of faith and confidence that helped Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. organize a march on Washington with a dream that would transform the thinking of humankind. This kind of faith gave Moses a song of deliverance at the Red Sea when all the odds were against him. This confidence gave Joshua faith to sing a song at Jericho and it brought the walls down.

When one is involved in singing a song of deliverance their is no time for horizontal violence or violence of any kind because songs of deliverance are songs of love, caring, sharing, living, building, giving, and hoping. Deliverance is

a corporate effort because just it takes an entire village to raise a child. Raise that child to sing songs of faith in a strange land. Raise that child to sing songs of hope in a strange land. But, the greatest song that one can ever teach a child to sing is a song of love! No person has a greater love than the love s/he displays when s/he lays down his/her life for their brother or sister.

When Your Patience Runs Out

"I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry." Psalm 40:1

Not all of us have that kind of patience where we can wait and hold out like Job until your change comes. The Psalmist declared, "I waited patiently for the Lord." I looked in Roget's Thesaurus, the expanded edition and found that patience is defined as the capacity to endure hardship or inconvenience without complaint. It also listed patience as forbearance, long-suffering, resignation, tolerance, and indulgence. I discovered in reading the Psalms that the Psalmist was not always patient. He declared in Psalm 40:1 "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined His ear and heard my cry."

On several occasions the Psalmist indicates his impatience with God while he waited for his deliverance for whatever crisis claimed his life and for that moment. Even though in Psalm 40:1 he declared "I waited patiently for the Lord and the Lord heard my cry." While he waited, he declared in Psalms 41:5 "My enemies speak evil against me.". In Psalm 54:3 he declared while he waited "Strangers have risen up against me." In Psalm 27:12 the Psalmist declares, "Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence."

The Psalmist is teaching us a lesson about patience. One

of the things that I discovered, my brothers and sisters, is that men, more than women, are prone to impatience. I still have memories in my mind of my grandmother sitting in the corner humming to herself and moaning. I would always grab hold of grandma's dress or apron and ask questions. Grandma would never answer, but she would keep on moaning and rocking. I discovered later that grandma was just being patient. She was waiting for God to answer her prayers. Grandma had two sons who did not always act the way that she had raised them. One of them was my father. She waited patiently for them to come home when they knew they should have been there hours earlier.

While we are waiting patiently, we have a tendency to raise questions with God. We can see this in the Book of Psalms. There is a powerful motivation in our spirit to debate or dialogue with God. The Psalmist is no different. In Psalm 13:1, the Psalmist raises several questions while he waits and attempts to be patient. "How long will you forget me, oh God?" Some of us are raising the same question today. We feel that while we are waiting, God has forgotten us, and left us is pain, suffering and misery.

Still another question the Psalmist raises is "How long (God) will you hide your face from me?" When we see the devastation in our communities, drugs, murders, robberies, homelessness, dysfunctional families, and teen pregnancy, we feel that God has neglecting us. Has God rejected us?! Has

God turned His back on us?! Has God turned His face from us?! And the Psalmist says, "How long will you hide your face from me" in that he feels that God is ignoring his prayers. "How long shall I take counsel with my soul?" The psalmist is bringing in that position of loneliness when we are waiting and trying to be patient, we feel like we are out there all by ourselves, and the only real entity is our soul.

We are really struggling to get out of our pit. "How long shall I have sorrow in my heart?" "How long shall my enemies exalt themselves over me?" All of these questions come out of Psalm 13. The Psalmist raises some crucial questions that many of us who claim to be saved, sanctified, filled with the Spirit of God raise, especially when we are trying to be patient. I do not want to look foolish, the Psalmist says because it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God. In other words, I believe there is a God, but I am standing out here looking foolish waiting on God who never shows himself to me, never comes and sits down and give counsel to me, never wipes away my tears when I really need it. I am claiming to be holy and I am claiming to be patient, but all I get is tears for my drinking water. It is the fool who says in his heart there is no God and God knows I do not want to be fool.

The dialogue goes on between the Psalmist and God. "You see God my patience has run out. Are you there? My patience has run out, my bills are mounting up, and there is suffering

all around me. The pain and abuse is more than I can take. My patience has run out. I want to raise some questions with the hope that you might enter into a dialogue with me, because no one else is talking to me. No one seems to be giving me sound advice or any possible solutions.

It would appear that every one is getting a breakthrough except me. I go to the revivals and I am not revived. I come through the prayer line and every one is being blessed but me. Lord, it appears that you have placed me at the bottom of your list. While everyone else is talking about showers of blessings. I am still waiting for the showers of blessing to fall on me, even me Lord, even me. The more I raise these questions concerning our relationship God, the more I have questions to ask. Therefore, I raise just one more question to you God, "Why are you so far off?!" There appears to be a great distance between us! You claim to be a right know God! A very present help in the time of trouble! You also claim to be a God who walks beside me and who talks to me, but it seem that I am yelling and crying in the wilderness!

I have another question God , "Why do you hide your self from me in time of trouble?!" In Psalm 27 David said that in the time of trouble you would hide him. Sometimes God, I have found that when I am in trouble you just hide from me! Have you ever been there?!

Sometimes God hides us from our enemy, and sometimes he puts us under the shadow of His wings. Other times He puts us

on a rock to stay, but there are times when God leaves us where it is painful, violent, and dangerous. This is when everyone who has a grudge, or is miserable for whatever reason, or has a bad day decides to take there frustrations out on you. Therefore, I ask another question, "God how long will you turn my glory into shame (Psalm 4-2)."

You need to read these the Psalms and understand that this is a real person. These Psalms are here really to help us get through the problems we face every day in life. Situations that we are going through mainly because of impatience. We have to understand that when our patience runs out certain things begin to happen to our personality. Its not just adults but our children as well.

We live in a generation, my brothers and sisters, of young people that have lost all patience. They have no patience with themselves or with each other. Anytime a young person will shoot another person in cold blood taking their life for a pair of tennis shoes or a sports jacket, then that is a lack of patience, and a total disregard for the value of human existence!

When your patience runs out, anxiety sets in; you develop an angry mind-set; you cannot grow spiritually. When your patience runs out, you become impatient with all things; you have a tendency not to act your age. When your patience runs out, then you develop problems accepting responsibility. When your patience runs out, you cannot be objective. When your

patience runs out, you have an inability to control your emotions; you become insensitive to other persons feelings; there is a willingness to become selfish. When your patience runs out you develop a poor self-image; you are ashamed of what you see in the mirror, you are ashamed of the way you look, your weight, who you are with, you are just ashamed!

When your patience runs out, you develop an inability to make decisions. You just do not know how to trust your decisions anymore. When your patience runs out, you cannot live with the consequences of the choices you have made.

Some of us are here because we have not been able to deal with the choices we have made and we constantly live in a state of "only if." Only if I had not married him or her; only if I had taken this job; if I had only saved my money and not purchase during my emotional crisis; if I had only stayed home instead of going out of town. We can spend the remainder of our lives second guessing, but it solves nothing!

We are constantly challenging our position with God. The Hebrews in the Old Testament understood the context of patience contrary to what the Thesaurus states. The Hebrews had a different understanding of patience. The Thesaurus states that patience is the capacity to endure hardship or inconvenience without complaint, but the Old Testament's understanding of patience meant waiting patiently for God to act when other help had failed. In other words, if you believed in God and trusted in God sooner or later God was

going to come, there was no doubt. That is why we get up in the morning and sing that song:

"I woke up early this morning with my
mind stayed on Jesus, ... and
I did not have no doubt."

If you know what patience is all about, you believe that sooner or later God is going to take you out of your situation.

When weights of life are thrown on you, be persistent, be determined to wait on God, with the understanding that God is going to act on your behalf because all others have failed and God never fails.

The Hebrews, however, sometimes failed to comprehend God's timing as it related to their struggles. That was the major problem with the Psalmist. I believe this is a major problem with us today, even though we understand that patience means waiting persistently. Waiting persistently would indicate that you are not going to give up, but you are going to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding while waiting on God, no matter how big the problem.

You must understand as the Hebrews found out, there was a timing factor in their relationship with patience and trust that sometimes clouded the vision of the Hebrews. I believe that it also confuses us sometimes. God has a timing to all of His plans, and we have to understand that it has nothing to do with whether God likes you more than He likes someone else.

It is all a part of God's plan. This is one of our struggles; that we see other people going through crises and they spend less time in their struggles than you.

In a sense that is very painful. We go through some crises and we keep going through them, but the issue we must understand is that God has a plan for our deliverance. What you do not want to do is get ahead of God's plan. When you get ahead of the plan you get out of God's will. The last thing you want is to be out of the will of God.

The Hebrew Psalmist had another problem in his concept of patience, trust, and waiting on God. The Psalmist had a low expectation of deliverance beyond the moment of crisis. The Psalmist indicates how he became consumed by the crisis. He became more involved with the struggle than fellowship with God. We also have a tendency to get more involved in the struggle instead of involving ourselves with God's fellowship.

On occasion, the Psalmist actually endorse the fact that there may be other alternatives and solutions to God's plan. Sometimes you can be so involved in your struggle that you can endorse the fact that there may be other alternatives than the one that God has already given you. God tells you to stay right where you are, stay right in that struggle. I am going to deliver you, and all you try to do is get free. God told Moses, as He is telling us today, to work with what he had in his hand, but all you want to do is drop what we have in our hand and pick up something else. Jacob wrestled with his

crises all night until the Lord blessed him. It was painful for Jacob, but he endured. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning!

The problem as I stated with the Hebrews and it is also with us, is that we have a misunderstanding of God's timing as it relates to patience. There are two types of time in the providence with God. First, there is Kairos time, which simply means that time is fixed or definite, fulfilled or appointed properly in God. It is time that affords us an opportunity or a while to accomplish the things of God. The second time is the Chronos time. This is the root word for chronology. This is measurable time, clock time or a succession of moments. In other words, Chronos time in God embraces Kairos time. Therefore, when you have a Kairos time, it is embraced in Chronos time. Kairos time is the time you spend in your pain, in your sorrow, in your suffering those momentary afflictions spoken of in Paul's letters. But there is Chronos time, time when God lifts you up. It is the time when God raises us above the pain and encompasses us in the Kairos moment so we can see our problems below us and get a better perspective of how to deal with them. I am here to tell you today that only God can raise you up. Only God can take you out of your Kairos moment. Only God can lift you up to the point where you can see your difficulties.

Every now and then the Psalmist would put a Psalm together so that it had some meaning. There was a song that

was very popular a few years ago that says, "Lord lift me up where I belong." The writer of this song did not realize it then, but he was giving an example of movement from the Kairos moment to the Chronos moment.

There are times when we fell unable to go on because of our burdens. I suspect that O.J. Simpson was in this predicament after being accused of murdering his wife and companion. I am not here to condemn him, but he was at a Kairos moment in his life where he could not deal with the stress any longer.

Therapist will tell you that there is a point in stress related therapy that says that under tremendous stress we either fight-or-take flight. When Simpson reached that painful Kairos moment he had run out of fight. He had run out of the ability to endure therefore he ran. Before you condemn Simpson, understand that some of us could be there. Some of us may be at a point where the next crisis could cause us to go over the edge.

Even though the Psalmist had gone through his stages of impatience, like Simpson he wanted to run from his problems, but he stayed and learned something.

What can we learn about patience from this Psalmist? In this Psalm the first thing that we can learn is: if you want to be happy, perfect, delivered and set free, you have got to learn how to put your trust in God. All other methods may work temporarily, but eventually they will fail. It does not

matter how much medication you take or how much therapy you take, if you God is not a part of the process it will fail. I does not matter how many spiritual guides you have; how many psychic friends you have if God is not the author it will fail.

The Psalmist learned by experience, therefore he teaches us, that his relationship with God was the only thing that he could trust. The only thing we can hold on to and holds on to us is God. We must learn to trust in God.

The next thing the Psalmist teaches us is not to conceal your steadfastness. Steadfastness is the synonym of persistence. In other words, you have to be consistent with God. O.J. had one friend out of all the lives he touched and the people who claimed to be his friend. In his time of need where were they. You had better find yourself a friend who will stick closer than a brother. There is not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no not one. You may not be like Simpson who had a friend who would drive him through traffic when there are hundreds of police in hot pursuit. I have a friend that in the midnight hour, when the pressure and stress of life weigh me down fall on my knees and call on God.

The last thing this Psalmist discovered was and is that God is my help and my deliverer. What a testimony! After going through all of the bitterness as to why God was not answering his prayers, the Psalmist realized that God is our help. This gave the Psalmist a sense of joy that strengthen

him. I discovered after all that I have been through I still have joy. I still have a God who helps me. I still have a God who delivers me. I do not know about you, but when your patience runs out you better know how to call on His name!

In closing, I still think about a member, Sis. Gloria Mooring-Davis suffering from terminal cancer, in and out of George Washington Hospital. The doctors never giving any encouragement. They send her home and she still comes back and they say we can't help you, we will contact your family for you. She just smiles and says I know a God who will not forsake me or leave me. He is my help, He is my deliverer. I do not know about you, but I am trying to reach that stage of faith, trust, and patience in God that she has. When you visit her in the hospital you will not recognize her. She is swollen and her hair has come out, but in her heart she is beautiful in the Lord.

I do not know about you, but every now and than my patience runs out. My patience is trampled, but the Holy Spirit lifts me, empowers me, and blesses me. God calls and says, I am the one who will take you out of your Kairos moment and put you in Chronos time.

I am the one who will deliver you.
I am the one who healed you,
I am the one who loves you.

Understand my sisters and brothers that Jesus loves you, this I know for the Bible tells me so! I know every now and then

we get tired and our patience wears thin, but understand that God loves you and He appreciates you! Through it all God will bless you!

GOD MAJORS IN IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

"And Jesus said to His disciples, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"
Matthew 19:26 (KJV)

We spend a great deal of time giving God nonessential, immaterial, easy to accomplish situations, when God says, I major in the impossible. There are some things that I believe as a preacher that God instructs us and gives us the capacity to handle. Once we reach a competent level of spiritual maturity, God releases us. Sometimes God listens to our prayer requests, but does not answer immediately. It is not that God does not hear what you are requesting; it is not that God does not receive your request or petition. However, in many instances God simply remains silent until God decides to speak and act.

Have you ever picked up your phone after so many rings and you say 'hello' and there is no sound on the other end? That is what happens sometimes with our call. I would submit to you that God expects us to get involved with the process of prayer, has given us a measure of faith, grace and ability to deal with crises. Struggling is an effective way of learning how to overcome difficulties. Many of us are still immature Christians because we are constantly bombarding God with things that we should be able to handle on our own. Yet, God has patience with us. What does God have to do to move us out of our infantile stage?

It is very frustrating being a parent to children who will not grow up. It becomes a battle, your will against their will. You are determined to teach them and they are determined they are not going to learn. So it is with God. God is trying to teach us that we can do what seems to be impossible. We must understand that our selfish decisions, will not prevail when God is trying to groom us into becoming His children.

God deals in the impossible and we must understand this. It is not that God does not want to help you or work with you, but God wants us to get involved in the process of the impossible. We call this impossible process faith, because for we walk by faith and not by sight.

We are not much different than the disciples whose problem centers around their personal issues. We concentrate on personal issues that we manufacture into impossible issues. Our thoughts and our conversations are preoccupied by these issues. All around us we are side-tracked by issues that can be solved if we allow God's wisdom to help us solve them.

Jesus had to inform His disciples one day that His ministry deals with the impossible, that is the problems, and crises that they are not able to accomplish. After they heard the story of the Rich Young Ruler, they came to Jesus and wanted to know, how could they inherit eternal life. In other words, how could they get into the kingdom and Jesus told them and the Rich Young Ruler to dispose themselves of everything

they had and then follow Him. In other words, put aside all of the things that might prevent or detain you from entering into the knowledge of God.

It behooves us to move from knowledge to knowing. This is not impossible for man. Knowledge of God is in your head, it is what you read, study and comprehend. Knowing God is in your heart. It is when you operate from the premise that what is written in the Scriptures about is compatible with your experiences of God is true even when you do not fully comprehend the text. Nevertheless, you know inside instinctively that it is going to be well with your soul. Knowledge of God is something that is cerebral. Knowing God is more than what you acquire in your mind; it is more than what you might read. Knowing God is believing that He stands behind His Word. Knowing God is what makes that Word a reality. This is not impossible for man! Knowing God is when you can walk like Job and say, "I know that my redeemer lives..."; or preach like Paul and say, "I know in whom I believe..., and I know that if this earthly body, of this tabernacle dissolves there is another building not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens."

You have defeated the impossible when you can state, no matter how many physical attacks I sustain to my body, no matter how many personal crises come my way, I know in whom I believe!

Jesus is said to His disciples then, and He is saying to

us now, it is impossible for a person to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven if that person is not willing to surrender all to God. This is not impossible for us, but we must surrender. When we surrender to God, God can completely use us. We no longer live defeated lives, because the violence is overcome defeated. Now it is time for us to go back into our communities and reclaim what is rightfully ours in the Name of Jesus! This is not an impossibility! Stand up and claim your deliverance in the Name of Jesus!

"KIAMSHA:" THAT WHICH AWAKENS ME

"Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, you must say, Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel answered, 'Speak, for Your servant hears.'" I Samuel 3:9,10 (KJV)

We need to reflect on the fact that in our society of complacency and dormancy, a place where we are complacent with things that are around us, then it would appear that God is the only Being that could awaken us out of our sleep. It is clear in this text that there was a problem in Israel. The first verse in the first chapter it say, that in these days the word of the Lord was not present. It was rare occurrence for anyone to hear a word from the Lord. It was a rare occurrence for anyone to see a vision, these were troubled times. The author wanted you to know in the first verse of the third chapter that even though Eli was a priest and was ministering in the temple that the word of God was rare. Not only was the word of God rare but no one was claiming to have any vision, or revelation or any open experience with God.

Eli knew this was a problem because he had two sons that he hoped would follow in his foot steps. One of his son's was named Phineas and the other son was named Hophniah. They were an embarrassment to Eli who was a priest. Everybody respected him in the community and looked up to him but every time Eli came to town a neighbor or a member of the community would run up to him to tell Eli what his sons were doing. It

got so bad that these two sons developed a reputation that they were no longer allowed in the temple.

Imagine that they became so obnoxious and so bad in the community that their reputation preceded them. It go so bad that when they were on their way to the temple the gatekeeper would start closing the gate because they said here comes Phineas and Hophniah. They were no longer allowed in the temple because they were an abomination and they did things in the temple that were obnoxious and not pleasing to God.

Imagine being raised by a priest; they new better. The more Eli tried to get them in line, the more Eli tried to reason with them and have compassion with them, the more they went to do their own thing. Pretty soon Eli was spending more time with these two sons than he was spending ministering to the Lord. They got to a certain age that Eli could no longer speak to them. They would not awaken, they were not open to any kind of advice from any elder in the city. It was Eli's prayer and his desire that these young boys would outgrow this and that one day they would follow him into the temple. How could they do? They did not anything about ministering to the Lord, they knew nothing about lighting the candles they did not know anything about the blood offering, fat offering or meal offering. One day something really obnoxious happened, it was during the time of a fat offering when they would slaughter an ox or a lamb and throw the meat offering into the flame and the meat would burn. Any meat that was left alive

after that burning was left for the priest. The priest was a part of the ritual in that if the meat did not burn all the way it was left for the priest. These boys who saw an opportunity to pull something on their father, they switched the meat in the offering and this was such an abomination to God and to the priest that they were never permitted to enter the temple during a sacrifice.

The Word of the Lord came to the priest that day and said and God spoke to Eli and the rest of the priest saying, I would raise up a faithful priest, and that I will raise up a faithful servant who will do according to that which is pleasing to my heart and to my eye. I will build up his house and establish him that he would be anointed by me and walk in my way. Eli forgot about it, he did not think about it anymore. He forgot that he had left young Samuel who was about twelve years old sleeping in the temple near the ark of the covenant. It was Samuel's duty to make that the lamp of God would not go out during the night.

The Lamb of God was always supposed to burn symbolic of the presence of God when people would come in and minster particularly the priest so Eli gave Samuel this job. He could not give the job to his sons, they could not be found. Here we find Samuel sleeping by the ark of the covenant, while the Scriptures make it plain that Samuel was a young man of only twelve, and he did no know the Lord. Not only did Samuel not know the Lord, but the Word of God was rare in those days,

prohibiting any special revelations, prophecies or visions unless God chose to make the disclosure.

While Samuel was sleeping in the inner chamber and Eli was sleeping int the outer chamber making sure the lamp would not go out, the voice of the Lord cried out in the night, "Samuel, Samuel." Samuel being a young man and knowing the voice of his elder jumped up and ran out thinking that the voice that he heard was Eli. He shook Eli and said, "Yes Eli, what is it that you would have me do?" Eli said, "I did not call you, go back to sleep." Samuel said, "You sure you did not call me, I heard you." Eli said, "Go back and lay down". Can you not see how perplexed Samuel might be at this point? He heard that voice distinctly, yet the voice did not originate from Eli. Samuel obeyed his priest and went back and laid down.

Later on during the night Samuel heard the voice call him again, "Samuel, Samuel." He jumped up and ran out and said, "Eli here I am, what is it that you want!?" Eli was an old man, the Scripture says that his eyes were beginning to dim to the point that he could not see clearly. He said to Samuel, "I did not call you, go back and let this old man get back to sleep." Samuel went back in by the ark and laid down a second time. The voice called him a third time saying, "Samuel, Samuel." He came running in again saying, "Eli, Eli, you called me."

By this time, I am sure that Samuel thought that Eli was

calling him in his sleep. There was no one else in the temple except the two of them, and they are ministering to the Lord while watching and taking turns lighting the candles making sure that the candles did not burn out. Samuel goes back and Eli said, "Come here Samuel, the next time you hear this voice say 'Here I am, I am your servant and I am listening.'" Eli in his wisdom could tell that God was calling Samuel.

It is quite possible that our young adults today are hearing calls from God and other sources that could change their lives forever. In our communities, our young people hear voices of violence and social unrest that drive our children to break the law. Our young adults need to be taught to hear the voice of God; children need to know that there is no age where God is not will to call you. God can awaken you now because your mind is so impressionable and not cluttered with a preconceived ideas. God can get your attention much quicker than God can obtain an adults attention. We have too many things on our mind. If we are not thinking about our personal finances, education for our children, either our health or our family's health, retirement, then we are contemplating when we think we are going to be laid off from our jobs.

When you are young and not encumbered or bothered by many distractions, God can use you. Young people take a lesson from Samuel, you do not have to believe that because you are 13 to 17 years of age that you have to wait until you are 22

or 30 years of age before God can use you.

When God called Samuel the forth time Samuel said, "Here I am Lord, your servant hears". Samuel was about to be confronted by Kiamsha. Kiamsha is Swahili "for that which awakens me." That which was about to awaken, arouse, stimulate, and stir Samuel would change his life forever. Samuel like so many of our young people did not believe that his life had much meaning, purpose, or relevance, however the Kiamsha experience, the awakening changed all of that.

Why is it so important to have an awakening? Why is it important that our youth have a Kiamsha experience as we approach the 21st century?

First, Kiamsha helps us clarify the voices that either serve us or starve us. Each person, no matter what the age group, is responsible for making decisions that so day s/he might regret. Samuel chose to follow the voice after he had conferred with his mentor Eli. Everyone should have an Eli when in his/her life, especially when there are difficult decisions to be made. Eli's purpose at that moment was to perceive that God was calling Samuel. Imagine how different our lives would be today if someone like Eli had given us the proper guidance when we needed it.

Our youth today, and yes even some adults, need someone like Eli to be there when needed to perceive and to discern the various voices that call us daily to a life changing experience. Fortunately, I had a pastor as my Eli to guide me

when the voice of God was calling me to Christian ministry. However, everyone was not as fortunate as I, to have a Rev. John Bryant to steer me in the right direction at the right moment.

Second, Kiamsha solicits a response of submission to God. Samuel acknowledged a response to God by calling himself a servant. The Kiamsha experience solicits a submissive to God through servanthood. One discovers at that moment that s/he are not here to be served but to serve others. When one realizes this responsibility of service, one can easily see the futility of violence. Voluntary submission to God does not invoke the wrath, longsuffering, or absence of God. God is not pleased with rebellious, defiant, unruly, or resistant people. As parents, we should not be pleased with the negative way our youth are working in school system and in our communities. Guns and drugs are instruments of violence to our personhood and not instruments of service to our communities.

Finally, it is important that our we have a Kiamsha experience to begin to rebuild for the future in our communities. Once we have been awakened it becomes our responsibility to lead others from the violence and destruction in our homes and communities. Awakened people, enlightened people are obligated through their servanthood to assist those cannot assist himself or herself. Once Samuel became awakened

Although Phineas and Hophniah, the rebellious, defiant, unruly, and resistant sons of Eli, at one time were considered the most likely candidates to follow Eli as priests, the awakening of Samuel change all of this. God found the obedience in Samuel that was lacking in both Phineas and Hophinah. Kiamsha changed Samuel's life forever.

Everyone needs a Kiamsha in his or her life. Moses experienced his Kiamsha while guarding his father-in-laws sheep near Mt. Horeb. Moses saw a bush that burned but was not consumed and the voice that spoke to him from the bush changed his life forever. Isaiah experienced his Kiamsha while carrying out his temple responsibilities. In the midst of the temple smoke, he saw God high and lifted up. The experience exposed Isaiah to his finitude, and communities uncleanliness. Isaiah's servanthood began when he requested that God send him where he would be needed. One day I experienced my Kiamsha, realized my responsibility to servanthood and turned my life over to God, and my life has not been the same since.

APPENDIX TWO:

A SURVEY OF PREACHING TO THE CRISIS OF VIOLENCE IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Is it possible that preaching in the African American church plays more than a significant role in the well-being of the African American community? In pursuit of an answer, the author developed a questionnaire as a basic instrument of data gathering. The questionnaire dealt with a range of subjects, such as attendance, sermon integrity, sermon delivery, sermon content concerning victims of violence, and a challenge to the listener. (See the Questionnaire in Appendix Three.) The entire questionnaire was aimed at the general congregation, as well as, victims of violence. Three hundred and ninety-two, or 78.4%, of the five hundred questionnaires were returned, providing the data on which the findings of this limited, targeted study are based.

All the respondents were asked to reflect their position by indicating either 'yes' they agree or 'no' they disagree. The respondents were also asked to reflect their positions concerning two multiple choice questions which allowed the respondents to choose more than one response.

Certain limitations to the data-gathering should be noted

here. The sample population is from a single geographical area, namely the Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church located in the Washington Metropolitan and Prince George's County, Maryland, and therefore may not reflect national perceptions.

The research process involved the distribution of the five hundred questionnaires to the members of Hunter Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, Suitland, Maryland. A five sermons were preached over a five week period. One hundred questionnaires were distributed each Sunday between the 8 a.m. and the 11 a.m. services for five Sundays. To gain further responses, the author interviewed individuals who had been victimized either before or after this project began. The substance of these interviews will be included in the overall substance of the analysis of the results of the survey.

Review of the Data

Age range is crucial to the findings, and it is important, therefore, to see the classifications into which those responding were grouped. (Not all responded to Question 25).

Age Range	Number
Below 19	none
20 - 34	49
35 - 50	112
51 - 60	56
60 and over	56

The median was thirty-five years. Of those respondents who

participated 13% were males and 51.7% were females. It is fair to observe, however, that in this analysis and typically in the African American church, the female plays a significant role in attendance. In the following:

Church Attendance

Group	Number	Percent
Once per month	14	3.6
Twice per month	7	1.8
Three per month	77	19.6
Four per month	133	33.9

Clearly, the majority of the 53.5% who attend worship three to four times per month are female, while less than 5.4% attend at least twice per month. Of all the respondents, 17.9% indicated that they had been victims of violence, 55.4% indicated that they knew of a relative or friend who had been victimized.

An interesting observation was identified in the analysis of the survey. This author expected to find a larger number of victims of violence than the survey showed. As it turned out, the people surveyed did not out number those identified as victimized relatives or friends of the respondents (Questions 2 and 3).

Victims of Violence

Classification	Number	Percent
Yes	70	17.9
No	245	62.5

Know Someone Victimized		
Yes	217	55.4
No	105	26.8

This outcome was the reverse of what was expected to be the ratio of victims vs. non-victims in the congregation. Thus, the survey actually showed that there might in fact be a greater need to past the sermons on to friends and relatives who have been victimized. On the other hand, when this group was asked to respond to Question 24, the sermon was not the first thing that they used for inspiration:

Classification	Number	Percent
Reading the Scriptures	42	10.7
Prayer	217	55.4
Listening to a sermon	84	21.4
Talking with a minister	63	16.1

The sample population indicated that when reflecting upon a violent crisis more than half returned to prayer vs. listening to a sermon. Perhaps the sermon "Praying For A Breakthrough" helped the outcome of Question 24. This is based on the 51.8% who said they received strategies for addressing their victimization (Question 10); 33.9% said they now have a greater sense of commitment to reduce the cycle of violence in their communities (Question 16); 58.9% said the preacher should be the person to lead the community in the struggle against violence (Question 20). More than 60% indicated that the preacher should lead the community in its efforts to alleviate violence and suffering. This was an expected outcome due to the nature of the Prince George's county

Most of the research produced positive feedback with regard to the sermon (See Questions 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23). Eleven questions specifically addressed the sermon to reach the respondents views as to the sermons's effectiveness. The lowest affirmative response (Question 15) may be due to the fact that the results of this survey showed a low victim rate at Hunter Memorial (Question 2).

Sermon Effectiveness

	Classification	Number	Percent
5	sermon a believable testimony	301	76.8
6	sermon a unified goal	276	69.6
8	sermon initiate encounter w/God	276	69.6
9	sermon cause eagerness to serve	245	62.5
11	sermon was spiritually uplifting	308	78.6
15	sermon caused you to change	182	46.0
17	sermon maintained interest	245	62.5
18	sermon inspired you	210	53.5
22	sermon was understood by you	224	57.0
23	sermon can be shared by you	210	53.5

Although every respondent did not care to answer certain questions relevant to the sermons effectiveness, a significant number indicated the effectual works the sermons produced. Consequently, positive results were also observed in the analysis of the preacher's delivery (Questions 7, 12, 13, 21). For example, 64.3% stated that the preacher related the Scriptures to the violent crises in their communities; less than 4% said the manner in which the sermon was delivered interrupted their understanding; less than 4% indicated that the use of certain words or phrases was an obstacle for the setting, and finally less than 2% stated that the sermon

lasted too long.

Some of the analysis (Question 14) has shown that 75% of the those who participated would like for a Bible study started relevant to the topic of violence, less than 9% indicated that they would not attend. They seemed to have been inspired by this project and want a continuous Bible study related to the topics preached. Further analysis is needed as to what would be an effective curriculum to implement based on the population served.

APPENDIX THREE:

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please do not sign your name. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following reactions to certain social issues. Indicate your reactions by responding to the questions below. Your honest and straightforward answers will be appreciated. Your answers will be kept confidential. Thank you!

CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER OR CHECK 'YES' OR 'NO' IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.

1. How often do you attend church?
   a. once a month
   b. twice a month
   c. three times a month
   d. four times a month
   e. none

2. Have you been a victim of violence? Yes_____ No_____

3. Do you know of a relative or friend who has been a victim of violence? Yes_____No____

4. Have you at any time turned to the church for assistance? Yes_____No_____

   If yes, what made you turn to the church for assistance?_____
   _____

5. Is the sermon a believable testimony of God's love for you? Yes____No____

6. Did the sermon have a single unified goal which you could sense? Yes_____No_____

7. Did the preacher make the Scriptures applicable to the violent conditions that exist in your community? Yes_____No_____

8. Did the sermon initiate an encounter between you and God?

Yes_____No_____

9. Did the sermon make you eager to serve God any more than you have served God until now? Yes_____No_____

10. Did the sermon provide any strategies for addressing your victimization? Yes_____No_____

11. Was the sermon spiritually uplifting? Yes____No_____

12. Did the manner in which the preacher delivered the message help you understand the content? Yes____No____

13. Was the language used by the preacher appropriate for the message? Yes____No_____

14. Would you attend a Bible Study pertaining to the scripture and message the minister preached? Yes_____No_____

15. Did the message make you realize that you should change something in your life? Yes_____No_____

If so, what will you change about your life? _____
_____.

16. Did the message draw you to a greater commitment to address the cycle of violence in your community? Yes_____No_____

17. Did the sermon maintain your interest? Yes_____No_____

18. Did the message inspire you? Yes_____No_____

19. Should the preacher be a leader in the community? Yes_____No_____

20. Should the preacher lead the community in the struggle against the cycle of violence? Yes_____No_____

21. Did the sermon last too long? Yes_____No_____

22. Was the message understood by you? Yes____No_____

23. Would you be able to share this sermon with someone without the benefit of notes? Yes_____No_____

24. When reflecting on a problem about violence, which of the

following gives you the best inspiration:
a. reading the Scriptures
b. prayer
c. listening to a sermon
d. talking with a minister

25. Please supply the following information:
a. Sex (1) Male[ ]; (2) Female[ ]
b. Marital Status: (1) single[ ]; (2) Married[ ]; (3) Widowed[ ]; (4) Divorced[ ]
c. Age (1) up through 19 years[ ]; (2) 20-34[ ]; (3) 35-50[ ]; (4) 51-60[ ]; (5) over 60[ ]

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